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Yashasvi Jaiswal and spinners make it India's day

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

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SC junks plea against Adani firms over import valuation

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Supreme Court has dismissed a review plea filed by Customs Department against Adani Power Maharashtra Limited (APML), Adani Power Rajasthan Limited (APRL) and others in a case pertaining to alleged overvaluation of imported goods.A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice Sanjay Karol said there was no error apparent on the face of the record. "No case for review under Order XLVII Rule 1 of the Supreme Court Rules 2013 has been made out," the bench said. The top court was hearing a review petition filed by the department challenging the 27 March, 2023 order of the apex court dismissing its plea. According to a lawyer, the court had found that the project cost of APML and APRL was similar. *—PTI*

Search on for 9 who went missing in Sabarimala

PATHANAMTHITTA, 25 JAN

Kerala police stated on Thursday that nine people have gone missing during the recently concluded two-month-long Sabarimala pilgrimage, and they have intensified their efforts to locate them. The nine people went missing between 15 November, 2023 and 20 January. The incidents were reported from places including Pampa, Nilakkal and Sannidhanam. Pampa police said under the direct orders of district police chief V Ajith, a thorough investigation is currently in progress. The missing people comprise four from Tamil Nadu, one from Kozhikode in Kerala, two from Andhra Pradesh, and one each from Karnataka and Telangana, they said *—PTI*

Experts to review S African Cheetahs' 2nd home in India

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

A South African delegation, including wildlife experts, will arrive in February to assess the conditions at Madhya Pradesh's Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary which is slated to become the second home of cheetahs in India, officials said on Thursday. "Thereafter, a call on bringing the next batch of cheetahs will be taken," the official said. The two female Namibian cheetahs who recently gave birth to a total of seven cubs will be released in the wild only when the weather conditions improve. SP Yadav said the next batch of cheetahs will be imported from South Africa. *—PTI*

SC sends notice to UP over ban on halal food

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Supreme Court on Thursday sought a response from Uttar Pradesh government and others on a plea challenging the notification prohibiting manufacture, storage, sale and distribution of food products with halal certification within the state, except for items produced for export. The 18 November, 2023 notification was issued by the office of Commissioner, Food Safety and Drug Administration, Uttar Pradesh, under the provision of Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. The apex court issued notice based on a plea filed by 'Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind Halal Trust'. The court also directed that no coercive steps will be taken against the trust and its office-bearers in the FIR lodged in Lucknow. *—PTI*

SHETTAR CHEATS ON CONG WITH BJP AGAIN

Shettar cites his long association with BJP, hails PM

JOINED CONGRESS ON 17 APRIL, 2023

Jagdish Shettar joined Congress in April 2023 after he was denied Assembly poll ticket by BJP *PHOTO: PTI*

A FEW MONTHS LATER.....BACK TO BJP

Jagdish Shettar who rejoined BJP being welcomed by the party Chief JP Nadda in New Delhi, on Thursday, *PHOTO: ANI*

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Former Karnataka chief minister Jagdish Shettar, who had quit BJP to join Congress ahead of the State Assembly polls last year, rejoined his old party on Thursday, reposing faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Shettar cited his long association with BJP, and said many of his well-wishers including party workers and leaders wanted him to be back.

"I am re-joining BJP. BJP had earlier given me a lot of responsibilities. But I went to Congress because of some other issues," Shettar told reporters after his formal re-induction into the BJP at its headquarters here.

> **After that event, there has been a lot of discussion in BJP in the last eight-nine months. Even BJP workers on the ground, leaders everybody asked me to come back whenever they met me on various occasions**
>
> -Jagdish Shettar, former chief minister

"After that event, there has been a lot of discussion in BJP in the last eight-nine months. Even BJP workers on the ground, leaders everybody asked me to come back whenever they met me on various occasions," he said. "Even our leader BS Yediyurappa, State President Vijayendra and national leaders wanted me to come back to the BJP," Shettar said, adding, "Accordingly, with our workers wanting, I am rejoining the BJP".

He said Modi has done "a lot of things" to strengthen the country. Under Modi's leadership, India has emerged as "a very powerful country" in the world. Welcoming him back to the party fold, senior BJP leader and Union minister Bhupender Yadav said Shettar wanted to return as the party is continuously carrying forward India's development journey and "establishment of Ram Rajya" under Modi's leadership.

"We believe that he will once again use his organisational and administrative capabilities in serving the party and work as party worker for the expansion of the organisation in Karnataka," the minister added.

Party sources said Shettar had met Home Minister Amit Shah and its National President JP Nadda as he was persuaded to re-join the saffron organisation which he had quit in a huff after being denied a ticket to contest the assembly polls.

He had then joined Congress but lost the polls. Congress has, however, made him a MLC, a position he has now quit to join BJP. *—PTI*

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She said Ram temple will be marked in history as 'India's re-discovery of its civilisational heritage' *PHOTO: SALAR*

Prez hails Ram Temple in R-Day eve speech

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said the Ram temple will be marked in history as "India's continued re-discovery of its civilisational heritage" and as a grand edifice. She said it gave a befitting expression not only of people's faith but also as a testament to people's enormous trust in judicial process.

In her address to the nation on the eve of the 75th Republic Day, she spoke on various issues including the welfare schemes initiated by the government and said it will be a proud day for the nation when it will be among those countries where homelessness "is a rarity".

She also lauded India's quest in space through Moon mission, Solar explorer Aditya L1, deep space probe X-ray Polarimeter Satellite called XPoSat, under preparation man-mission Gaganyaan and other technological milestones. She also touched on the conflicts that have emerged in several parts of the world and stressed at finding a way out in the light of reason. Murmu said the "magnificent" G20 Summit hosted by India provided lessons for all in making citizens participants in all matters. *—PTI*

India trashes Pak's 'assassination' charge

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

India on Thursday dismissed as "false and malicious" propaganda Pakistan's allegations linking Indian agents to the assassination of two Pakistani terrorists in Sialkot and Rawalkot last year.

"It is Pakistan's latest attempt at peddling false and malicious anti-India propaganda," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. The comments came hours after Pakistan claimed that it had "credible evidence" of links between what it called as "Indian agents" to the assassination of two Pakistani terrorists associated with the Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

India was carrying out "extra-territorial and extra-judicial killings" inside Pakistan, Foreign Secretary Muhammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi alleged at a press conference in Islamabad. "As the world knows, Pakistan has long been the epicentre of terrorism, organised crime, and illegal transnational activities," Jaiswal said. *—PTI*

Minor falls from pre-school terrace

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Gianna Ann Jito, a student, 4, is in critical condition in Bengaluru after a fall from her preschool's terrace. The incident at Delhi Pre-School in Chellikere in Kalyan Nagar, on 22 January has raised concerns, with suspicions about the school's account and unclear details surrounding the accident.

Gianna *PHOTO: SALAR*

Initially, the school told Gianna was injured because she hit a wall at the daycare, fell and vomited. However, later reports revealed that she fell from the terrace. The parents made multiple visits to different hospitals and then finally admitted her to Aster CMI Hospital. Her parents are distraught and perplexed by the inconsistencies. The school claims the CCTV malfunctioned that day, raising eyebrows amidst the family's discovery of bloodstains on the terrace. They filed a police complaint in Hennur police station.

Deepak L, Police Inspector of Hennur, told Salar News, "The child is in critical condition in the ICU. We are trying our best to collect concrete proof regarding this incident." *—Salar News*

OPS BENEFITS FOR 13K EMPLOYEES IN KARNATAKA: CM

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

The State Government has issued a notification for 13,000 State government employees who are recruited after 2006 to get the Old Pension Scheme.

The Old Pension Scheme provides a monthly pension, usually half of the last drawn salary, while the New Pension Scheme involves employee contributions to a pension fund, resulting in a lump sum payment upon superannuation. Congress has allowed employees selected through a recruitment notification before April 2006 to switch from the National Pension Scheme to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS). However, JD(S) President HD Deve Gowda criticised the order as "half-baked" and accused government of issuing it under pressure. *—Salar News*

EXPLORING THE PINK CITY

Macron arrives in India, holds roadshow with PM

JAIPUR, 25 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron took part Thursday in a roadshow in the Pink City, where the visitor was presented a replica of Ayodhya's Ram temple and offered masala chai from a teashop before the leaders sat down for bilateral talks.

Macron, who is the Chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations in Delhi on 26 January, also visited the hilltop Amber Palace, Jantar Mantar observatory and Hawa Mahal in a carefully curated tour that ended at an iconic palace-turned-hotel.

In the evening, the two leaders were driven in an open-top vehicle through a short stretch in the heart of the city, beginning from Jantar Mantar, the 18th century astronomical observatory which is now a Unesco heritage site.

They stood in the vehicle, chatting and waving at people who lined the route.

For the Prime Minister, it was the first visit to the city after the swearing-in of Bhajanlal Sharma who took over as the Rajasthan Chief Minister after the BJP victory in the recent assembly polls.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron during a roadshow, in Jaipur *PHOTO: PTI*

Modi and Macron got down in front of the breezy Hawa Mahal. They admired the lit-up five-storey building with nearly 1,000 windows and jharokhas'.

The two leaders visited a handicrafts shop in the area. Modi, who led the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya's new Ram Mandir this week, bought a small replica of the temple for the guest, according to the shopkeeper.

He paid Rs 500 for the artifact - digitally, through UPI.

And "Sahu chaiwala", who had set up a temporary stall for the occasion, accepted Rs 2 as token payment for the masala tea offered to the leaders. Again, the payment was digital. The two leaders boarded the open-top vehicle again to continue the roadshow up to Sanganeri Gate. From there, they were to be driven to Rambagh Palace for dinner and the bilateral talks. *—PTI*

Rumours rife over Nitish's return to BJP

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Signs of deepening fissures between Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and INDIA bloc allies have given rise to the possibility of his return to the BJP fold amid hectic efforts within the Opposition camp to stall any such development.

CM Nitish Kumar *PHOTO: PTI*

On a day RJD President Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya took a swipe at Kumar for "changing his ideology as the wind changes its direction" on 'X' following the JD(U) President's swipe at parties promoting family members in politics, a BJP leader well-versed with the state's politics said the party will be guided by its future political imperatives, and not past bitterness.

BJP has been showing signs of warming up to Kumar, who has swapped his alliance preference between the BJP and RJD-Congress-Left camp frequently while remaining in power, with its leaders toning down their criticism of him of late and even praising him at times.

Asked about the likelihood of Kumar's return to the BJP-led alliance, in an interview Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the party will consider if such a proposal is ever made. Kumar has been cut up with the INDIA bloc for not getting a position in the alliance commensurate.

JD(U) and RJD leaders have also been sniping at each other amid apprehensions among Kumar's supporters that their ally has been trying to undermine him in matters of governance as well as politics.

Acharya also deleted her posts targeting the chief minister without naming him, hours after putting them out. Bihar BJP accused Acharya, who does not hold any position in the RJD, of insulting Kumar and demanded an apology from her. Signs of disconnect among the INDIA parties in Bihar will suit the BJP in the run-up to the elections as the same alliance had handed it a big defeat in the 2015 Assembly polls before Kumar joined hands again with BJP-led NDA. *—PTI*

12 KILLED IN ACCIDENT AMID DENSE FOG IN UP

SHAHJAHANPUR, 25 JAN

Twelve people, including three women, died on Thursday morning when their autorickshaw collided head-on with a container truck plying on the wrong side of the road amid reduced visibility due to fog, police said.

The occupants of the autorickshaw were going to Farrukhabad to take a bath in the Ganga river on the occasion of 'Purnima', they said. The accident took place on Bareilly-Farrukhabad road near Sugsugi village in Allahaganj police station area, about 50 kilometres from the city, Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashok Kumar Meena said. Earlier, the SP had said the autorickshaw had collided with a tanker. However, after reaching the spot, he said it was found that the autorickshaw was hit by a container truck.

Meena said the deceased are Lalaram, 30, and his brother Puttu Lal, 50, Shivpal, 45, Surendra Kashyap, 50, Ankush, 50, Anant Ram, 35, and his wife Basanta Devi, 70, Maniram, 45, Pothiram, 50, Rampa Devi, 45, Rupa Devi, 50, and Adesh, 20. *—PTI*

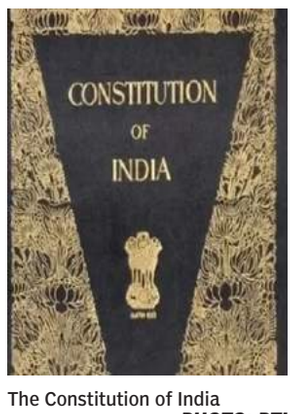
AWARENESS EVENT

Constitution Jatha starts in State today

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Karnataka government on Thursday said it is organising a statewide 'Constitution Awareness Jatha' (mass awareness) from 26 January to 23 February, to mark the 75th anniversary of the adoption of Indian Constitution.

A Constitution Workshop and Expo will also be organised on 24 and 25 February morning, and a mega Constitution Awareness Convention on 25 February evening, it said. Social Welfare Department is organising the events in collaboration with other departments, State PSUs and NGOs. Already, Rs 18 crore has been approved for the purpose and each district has been released Rs 25 lakh, the government said in a statement. The government is creating mass awareness to reaffirm the power of the Indian constitution through this "constitution and Unity of India" programme, it added.



The Constitution of India *PHOTO: PTI*

The Constitution Awareness Jatha would be organised in all the 31 districts. The jatha will have a LED mobile van that will play the multimedia on the essence of Constitution, how it has been prepared and adopted. The LED van will be followed by 4-5 more tableaus which depict contents related to the Constitution and other connected things specific to the districts.

During the jatha, the officials will also verify those citizens who are not covered in the State government's guarantee programmes and who could be otherwise eligible, it said. The jatha will have local halts, where cultural troupes will perform and there will be participation from the college students, workers, farmers and Self Help Groups. The jatha will be flagged off by the District Incharge Ministers on 26 January.

The second part of the programme is a workshop and expo, intellectual discourse and discussion by experts on many facets of the Constitution. It will be done at Palace Grounds in Bengaluru on 24 and 25 February. Concurrently there will be an expo on Constitutional values and science and Technology by KREIS (Karnataka Residential Educational Institutions Society) and other organisations.

This is jointly organised and curated by National Law School of India University, Institute of Social and Economic Change and Karnataka Law University. These institutions would be collaborating with other institutions and NGOs in organising the round table. The third part is a mega convention on Constitution awareness on 25 February at Palace Grounds where the public from all walks of life will gather. *—PTI*

Two from B'luru to get Karnataka award 2024

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Two people from Bengaluru will be receiving two different awards for the Karnataka awards 2024. Dr Vasundhara Bhupathi, who won the Akkamahadevi Award, which is a State prestigious award, comprises of cash prizes of Rs 5 lakhs, award, garland and plaque. Smt Chitra Venugopal has won the Shantala Natya Award, which is an annual award given by the Government of Karnataka to dancers for their contributions to classical dance. The award includes a plaque, shawl, garland, and a cash prize of Rs 5 lakhs. In addition to this 15 other people from Karnataka's different districts will be receiving various awards. Republic Day celebrations for 2024 will see 21 State police officers being awarded.*—Salar News*

6 arrested over fake currency in Davangere

DAVANGERE, 25 JAN

A gang involved in the production and circulation of counterfeit currency were arrested by Davangere police. Six people, including an engineer J Rudresh from Shivamogga were arrested, and fake notes in denominations of 500 and 200 worth Rs. 7.70 lakhs were seized. Other arrested suspects are Kuberappa Talwar from Davangere; Harish Gowda and Manoj Gowda from Mysuru; Sandeep from Mandya, and Krishna Nayka from Chitradurga. The authorities also confiscated the laptop used in the production of fake notes and discovered valuables worth three lakhs. The arrested individuals are expected to be presented before a court soon.
—Salar News

Woman accuses cop of rape, files plaint

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

A woman on Thursday lodged a complaint against a police officer accusing him of sexual exploitation under the false promise of marriage in Vijayapura district. The police have lodged a rape case against Vinayak Takkalagi attached to the Gandhi Chowk police station in Vijayapura city. According to the complaint, the woman from Basavana Bagewadi got introduced to the accused cop eight months ago. They exchanged phone numbers and started to chat and speak on call regularly. They eventually fell in love. The accused promised her marriage and developed physical intimacy. However, after a few days neglected her, and finally refused to marry her. The woman lodged a police complaint against him and submitted screenshots of chat history to the police. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

2 die in elephant attack in Ramanagara

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

In two separate incidents, two people including a woman were trampled to death by wild elephants in the State. In the first incident, Putnanja, 62, a farmer from Gerahalli in Kanakapura taluk of Ramanagara district trampled while he was guarding his Ragi field. The forest officials said the wild elephant attacked and killed Putnanja while he was asleep outside the farm. The region has witnessed a concerning surge in elephant intrusions, with more than 30 wild elephants migrated from the Tamil Nadu side and stationed near villages around Kanakapura. An atmosphere of fear has permeated the area, hindering the free movement of residents in evenings. The frequency of elephant attacks has escalated, prompting farmers to implore the State government for a solution.
—Salar News

Congress cries foul as Shettar 'breaches trust' yet again

CM and Shivakumar said Congress treated Shettar with respect

VIRAJPET/ BENGALURU, 25 JAN

State Congress hit out at former chief minister Jagadish Shettar for rejoining BJP, terming his move as a "breach of trust" and questioning his conscience.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and state Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said Congress treated Shettar with respect, after he joined the party ahead of last year's Assembly polls, while BJP had humiliated him by denying him the ticket to contest the elections in May.

Shettar, who rejoined his old party on Thursday, cited his long association with BJP, and said many of his well-wishers wanted him to back in the outfit.

"Shettar had told me that he was being requested (by BJP) and workers were being sent to meet him. He had told me that he would not go to BJP as Congress has given him another life. I am not sure why he changed his mind today. We don't know if there was any pressure on him. This is left to his conscience. Keeping his words in mind, I spoke about it in Mysuru, but now I got information that he is in BJP office," Shivakumar said.

Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru, he said Congress party, considering Shettar as a senior leader, treated him with respect.

"He (Shettar) had said that BJP is not good, he had made several statements against the BJP. Congress had trusted the senior leader and that trust is now breached. I have got information that he has sent his resignation (as MLC) to the Chairman of the Legislative Council. I don't know whether he has gone or has been taken (by BJP) under any pressure," he said.

CM Siddaramaiah and Jagadish Shettar *PHOTO: PTI*

> **He (Shettar) had said that BJP is not good, he had made several statements against the BJP. Congress had trusted the senior leader and that trust is now breached.**
>
> -Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar

- Shettar, who rejoined his old party on Thursday, cited his long association with BJP, and said many of his well-wishers wanted him to back in the outfit

Responding to Shettar's statement that he has rejoined the BJP in the national interest, Shivakumar asked, "Did he not know about national interest, when he was not given the ticket (by BJP)? Did he not know about Congress and national interest, when Congress made him MLC for five years?"

On whether Laxman Savadi (Congress MLC, who too had joined party from BJP ahead of Assembly polls) will also go back to BJP, Shivakumar said, "no one will go, quitting the party, Shatter has gone, it's a different matter, despite people rejecting him by a margin of 35,000 votes (in May Assembly polls."

Speaking to reporters at Virajpet in Kodagu district, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said he was not aware of the development, but repeatedly maintained that Congress treated Shettar respectfully and that he had assured that he would not go back to BJP.

"Shettar came to Congress stating that BJP humiliated him and did not give a ticket, we gave him a ticket as he is an ex-chief minister. He lost in the Assembly election from his own constituency. We then made him MLC. So no injustice or humiliation happened to him from the Congress party, we treated him respectfully," Siddaramaiah said.

—PTI

WILL HE OR WON'T HE?

Will not quit Congress: Savadi

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Laxman Savadi *PHOTO: FB*

- Savadi and Shettar were in BJP and they were denied party ticket to contest Assembly polls in 2023. Savadi wanted to be fielded from the Athani Assembly seat in Belagavi. Shettar and Savadi belong to the Lingayat community

MLA Laxman Savadi on Thursday said that he will continue to stay in Congress.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar met Laxman Savadi on Thursday and discussed the upcoming Lok sabha elections. Addressing the media in Bengaluru, Savadi said, "I will not go back to BJP for any reason. I don't know why Jagadish Shettar went back to BJP. Congress will not be damaged as Shettar has gone to the BJP."

Savadi added that Shettar should clarify on why he joined Congress and what made him quit the party.

"BJP is in need of leaders as Lok Sabha polls are round the corner, and it is inevitable for them to not paoch leaders," he said.

Savadi said leaders do get invited (from BJP) to return.

Savadi and Shettar were in BJP and they were denied party ticket to contest Assembly polls in 2023. Savadi wanted to be fielded from the Athani Assembly seat in Belagavi. Shettar and Savadi belong to the politically dominant Lingayat community which forms a major chunk of votes in north Karnataka districts of Karnataka.

Savadi won the Athani Assembly seat as a Congress nominee.

— Salar News

Cop, cyber expert nabbed in Bitcoin scam

BENAGLURU, 25 JAN

Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed to probe the Bitcoin scam that came to light during the previous BJP government has arrested a police inspector and a private cyber expert. The cop was previously attached to Central Crime Branch (CCB) of

Police said Prashanth Babu was a former police inspector of Central Crime Branch (CCB), and he is currently posted at the City police commissioner's office. The other accused is Santhosh Kumar KS, who runs a private firm and is cyber expert.

Babu is allegedly the a technical expert while the private cyber expert is one of the witnesses for the seizure of 31 Bitcoins from Sriki in January 2021.

- Police said Prashanth Babu was a former police inspector of Central Crime Branch (CCB), and he is currently posted at the City police commissioner's office

The development is likely to take a political twist ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, as the involvement of prominent politicians in the State is suspected in the scam.

The accused were arrested on charges of destroying the evidence regarding the scam. The SIT sleuths had called five people for interrogation on Wednesday and were likely to take all into custody.

The SIT team had summoned three deputy superintendent-rank police officers for questioning. The team had also summoned alleged kingpin Sriki for questioning.

The SIT under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was formed in September 2023. Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara had then said, "We had discussed about lakhs of crores of rupees being siphoned off during the previous BJP government. Now, we have ordered a reinvestigation."

The bitcoin scandal had taken place after CCB police arrested the alleged international hacker Srikrishna aka Sriki in Bengaluru in 2020 on the charge of selling drugs. It was alleged that using the accused hacker, the ruling BJP leaders had minted huge money by "allowing" him to commit the scandal in custody in 2020.

The probe revealed that the accused had siphoned off Rs 11 crore by hacking into online gaming companies and government web portals. The accused had allegedly converted the money into bitcoins and carried out drug peddling in Bengaluru.

As the scandal came out, Karnataka In-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala had attacked BJP central leadership as well as former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai over the scandal. *—Salar News*

POLL READY

HDK will contest LS polls if Modi wants him to: Gowda

HASSAN , 25 JAN

BJP and JD(S) have joined hands and struck an alliance in State to fight the ruling Congress in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls *PHOTO: PTI*

JD(S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda on Thursday indicated that his son and former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy may contest upcoming Lok Sabha polls, if Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah want him to do so.

BJP and JD(S) have ready joined hands and struck an alliance in Karnataka to fight the ruling Congress in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

"Kumaraswamy... leave aside the speculations, don't know what Modi will say. In case he says he (Kumaraswamy) has to contest parliament polls, he may contest from anywhere, he has no issues, whether it is Mandya or even Tumakuru or Chikkaballapura, he is being invited to contest from many seats," Gowda said responding to a question whether Kumaraswamy will contest Lok Sabha polls from Mandya. "It is for Modi and Shah to decide, if Kumaraswamy has to come to Delhi." "But, according to my knowledge, no such discussions have taken place so far. There are speculations about taking Kumaraswamy to Delhi and making him Minister in the central cabinet, but no such discussions have happened before me," the former Prime Minister added.

Asked whether his grandson and Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil Kumaraswamy will contest the Lok Sabha polls, the JD(S) supremo said, Kumaraswamy is against fielding him, and he will have to decide on it.

"About Nikhil Kumaraswamy, Kumaraswamy feels that he should not contest, but in Mandya party leaders have made an unanimous resolution demanding either Nikhil Kumaraswamy or Kumaraswamy has to contest from there, but Kumaraswamy has to give his approval to it, if he approves he (Nikil) will contest, if not no," he said.

—PTI

Justice PB Varale sworn-in as SC judge

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Karnataka High Court Chief Justice PB Varale was on Thursday administered the oath of office as a Supreme Court judge by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud here.

The swearing in function was held in the Supreme Court premises, a day after the Centre cleared his name for judgeship.

With the swearing in, the top court has attained its full strength of 34 judges, including the Chief Justice of India, and would for the first time have three sitting judges from the Dalit community. The other two sitting judges from the Scheduled Caste community are Justices BR Gavai and CT Ravikumar.While recommending Justice Varale's name earlier this month, a five-judge SC Collegium headed by CJI Chandrachud said it took into consideration the fact that he is among the senior-most High Court judges and is the only high court chief justice from the Scheduled Caste.

A vacancy arose in the apex court following the retirement of Justice SK Kaul on 25 December last year.

Justice Varale's appointment came within a week of the SC Collegium recommending his name."In exercise of powers conferred by clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution of India, the President is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Prasanna Bhalachandra Varale, Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court, to be a Judge of the Supreme Court of India, with effect from the date he assumes charge of his office," a law ministry notification read. *—Salar News*

Couple gets intimate in car, runs over cop

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

A couple engaged in an intimate act in their car near a park here on Thursday, reportedly ran over a police officer who tried to approach them for questioning. The incident took place within the jurisdiction of the Jnanabharathi police station, and the injured sub-inspector, Mahesh, is currently hospitalised. Police are on the lookout for the couple who have fled. According to the police, despite the presence of people around the park, the couple behaved indecently inside their vehicle. Sub-inspector Mahesh, who was on duty in the area, approached them to issue a warning and instructed them to leave. While noting down the vehicle's registration number, the couple abruptly started the vehicle. Disregarding the officer's presence, the youth drove away. *—Salar News*

BJP TO LAUNCH 'GAON CHALO ABHIYAN' FOR AWARENESS ON SCHEMES

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Ahead of upcoming Lok Sabha polls, BJP is set to launch "Gaon Chalo Abhiyan" from 9 to 11 February.

BJP's campaign aims to connect with 28,000 revenue villages and 19,000 urban booths in the State. Around 40,000 workers will be deployed to create awareness about the Central government's flagship schemes and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aspirations. The goal is to strengthen booth empowerment and enhance the party's door-to-door strategy in the concept of "Mann Ki Man" (voice of the heart) outreach. Workshops at the taluk level, door-to-door coverage of government achievements, and public awareness against state government misrule are part of the comprehensive approach. BJP aims to increase its vote share. *—Salar News*

Garbage poses health risk to school students

MYSURU, 25 JAN

PHOTO: SALAR

A mounting garbage pile at a disposal unit near a residential school is posing a risk to students' health in in Mysruru's Varuna constituency. The students of the Kittur Rani Chennamma Residential School in Kudluru villageare are compelled to cover their noses during lessons to ward off the stench.Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is the MLA of Varuna constituency. Despite repeated appeals to authorities, the issue has caused concern among both students and teachers. The girls' residential school itself is in a precarious position due to the municipality's neglect. Students and teachers are worried over the threat of an epidemic outbreak. The residents and parents are distressed by the lack of action and the apparent disregard for the well-being of the students. Recently, there was a fire that broke out in the garbage disposal unit amd engulfed the school and dormitory in thick smoke. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Traffic police issues restrictions ahead of R-Day

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Bengaluru traffic police issued a traffic advisory for Republic Day to avoid traffic snarls. Karnataka Governor will host the national flag in Manekshaw Parade Ground.

Traffic movement on BRV Junction, Kamaraja Road Junction, and Cubbon Road will be restricted from 8:30am to 10:30pm. Vehicles traveling from these roads can use alternative routes.

The traffic coming from Manipal Junction towards BRV Junction on Cubbon Road will be prohibited near Manipal Center and it will need to take right turns near Webbs Junction and move on MG Road Mayo Hall Junction, and then they will have to make a right turn at BRV Junction, and then head towards Central Street.

Vehicles from Anil Kumble circle can take Central Street and reach to Infantry Road and reach towards the Kamaraja Road to proceed towards Manipal Centre via Cubbon Road. Parking is prohibited in Anil Kumble Circle, Shivaji Nagar bus stand, Cubbon Road, KR Road and MG road junction. *—Salar News*

Water supply to be affected in City

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Bengaluru will experience disruptions in water supply on Republic Day, as the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) are conducting periodic repair and maintenance works. Residents are advised to plan accordingly and make necessary arrangements for their water needs during the period of maintenance.

The areas which are affected are-

JC Nagar, Mahalakshmi Layout, Muneshwara Block,Sriramanagar, JS Nagar, Saraswathipuram, West Of Chord Road, Ganesha Block, Mico Layout, Rajajinagar, Dr Rajkumar Road, Bhuvaneshwarinagar, Subramanya Nagar, Prakash Nagar, Goraguntepalya, Basaveshwara Nagar, BEML Layout, Gruhalakshmi Layout, Kamala Nagar, Kuvempu Park, SVK Layout, Karnataka Layout, parts of Gayathri Nagar, Milk Colony, Nandini Layout, Shankar Nagar, Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, KHB Colony, Yeshwantpur APMC and RMC Yard, Chandra Nagar, Chennigappa Layout, AK Colony, and other places.
—Salar News

AMID RISING DEMAND

CM mulls free electricity for coffee growers

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

Siddaramaiah said that while tobacco, areca nut estates receive power subsidies, coffee growers have been neglected *PHOTO: ANI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah asked officials to review the free electricity demand by coffee growers in Kodagu.

Siddaramiah on Wednesday said coffee growers have been demanding free electricity supply for pump sets up to 10 HP in their coffee estates. Despite assurances from State government this demand has not been fulfilled since 2008.

Siddaramaiah said that while tobacco and areca nut estates receive power subsidies, coffee growers have been neglected repeatedly.

The government is committed to rectifying this oversight and ensuring that coffee growers are not ignored again. What did ex-MLAs Appachu Ranjan and Bopaiah do for the coffee growers even though the previous ruling party made promises. Why haven't they acted upon it?" said Siddaramaiah

'ESCOMs will be privatised'

Former Minister and JD(S) HD Revanna on Thursday alleged that Congress government is planning to privatise ESCOMs and Karnataka power supply companies. He said that this also will result in electricity bill hike.

He accused the government for accumulating debt in the Electricity Department.
—Salar News

MP SDM transferred after woman ties his shoelaces

BHOPAL/ SINGRAULI, 25 JAN

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday ordered the transfer of the Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Chitrangi tehsil in Singrauli district after a viral photo showed a woman tying his shoelaces during a public event. Yadav said although he knows that the SDM had suffered an injury, the picture that emerged does not give a "good message", and asserted that women's respect was of paramount importance for his government.Chitrangi SDM, Aswan Ram Chiravan, against whom the Yadav took action, said he had suffered a knee-injury last month, but despite that he attended a religious programme on 22 January, where he removed his shoes to perform an 'aarti'. After that, a woman staffer from his office came forward to tie his shoelaces and the photo went viral.*—PTI*

Guj Independent MLA Dharmendrasinh Vaghela joins BJP

AHMEDABAD,25 JAN

Independent MLA DharmendrasinhVaghela tendered his resignation as a member of the Gujarat legislative assembly on Thursday, and announced that he would soon return to the BJP along with his supporters.Vaghela, who represented the Vaghodia assembly constituency in Vadodara district, claimed that the motive behind his resignation was to strengthen the hands of Prime Minister NarendraModi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah in their endeavour to establish 'Ram Rajya' in the country. Vaghela is one of the three independent candidates who won the 2022 Gujarat assembly elections.He was with the BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP) prior to the assembly elections, but rebelled against the party and fought the polls as an independent candidate after being denied the ticket. *—PTI*

BJP Prez launches party's theme song for LS polls

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

BJP President JP Nadda on Thursday launched the party'scampaign theme song for the upcoming LokSabha elections in the presence ofPrime Minister NarendraModi.The song in Hindi highlights as how Modi delivered on his promises and fulfilled people's dreams after they elected him at a time when the country was in a "bad shape".It says, "sapnenahihaqiqatbuntehain, tabhitoh sab Modikochuntehain" (weaving reality not dream, that's why everyone elects Modi).Nadda released the song at an event where Modi addressed young voters virtually. Ndda said, "Modi turns dreams into reality, guaranteeing delivery onpromises and dreams spanning generations. Dreams spanning decades or even going back to 500 years have been delivered by him."

—PTI

Kerala MLA under fire over anti-Hindu remarks

THRISSUR, 25 JAN

A Left MLA in Kerala has landed in trouble over a Facebook post in which he made derogatory remarks against Lord Ram, Sita, and Lakshman.The Communist Party of India's (CPI) legislator from the Thrissur Assembly seat, P Balachandran, withdrew the post as it became controversial.He said that he had simply posted an old story but expressed regret over the pain it had caused to the devotees."I posted an old story on Facebook the other day. I didn't mean to offend anyone. I retracted it within minutes, so no one should worry about it. I sincerely apologise," he said in another post.BJP alleged that only a Communist can trample on the beliefs of crores of Hindus and stated that legal action will be initiated against him. *—PTI*

Adhir is the reason for alliance not working out in WB: O'Brien

O'Brien alleged that Chowdhury was working at the behest of the BJP

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien Thursday held West Bengal Congress Chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury responsible for an alliance not working out between the two parties in West Bengal.

The remark came a day after West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee announced that her party will fight the LokSabha polls "alone" in the state.

"Three reasons for the alliance not working in Bengal – Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury," O'Brien told reporters here.

He also claimed that the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) had many detractors but only two -- the BJP and Chowdhury -- have repeatedly spoken out against the bloc.TMC leader further alleged that Chowdhury was working at the behest of the BJP.

"The voice is his, but the words are being dictated to him by the duo in Delhi. In the past two years, AdhirChowdhury has spoken the language of the BJP. Not once has he raised the issue of Bengal being deprived of central funds," O'Brien said.

"He even endorses ED actions in Bengal when they are against Trinamool.

The remark by O'Brien came a day after Mamata Banerjee announced that TMC will fight the polls alone ***PHOTO: PTI***

He holds special press conferences to belittle Mamata Banerjee and barely speaks against BJP leaders," he added.

Asked whether the TMC remains part of the INDIA grouping, O'Brien said, "After the general elections, if the Congress does its job and defeats the BJP on a substantial number of seats, the Trinamool Congress will very much be a part of the front that believes and fights for the Constitution and plurality."

Banerjee's sudden comments on Wednesday forced the Congress to adopt a conciliatory approach with party general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh asserting that the opposition bloc INDIA "cannot be imagined without Mamata Banerjee".O'Brien, however, stressed that the TMC has "turned the page".

—PTI

Hopeful of solving seat-sharing issue with TMC: Ramesh

SILIGURI , 25 JAN

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh Thursday said the party is hopeful of finding a solution to the seat-sharing impasse with the TMC, a day after its supremo Mamata Banerjee made a surprise announcement of going solo in the LokSabha polls in West Bengal.

Ramesh, while speaking to reporters at the Bagdogra airport here, maintained that the Congress cannot think of an INDIA bloc without Banerjee, as she is indispensable in the fight against the BJP in the country."If we want to defeat the BJP in Bengal and India, Mamata Banerjee is very much needed. Our leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and MallikarjunKharge have immense respect for Mamataji," he said.

Highlighting the Chief Minister's significance as one of the "important pillars of the INDIA alliance," the Congress general secretary said "no one can imagine the grouping without Mamata Banerjee and the TMC".Speaking about Mamata's decision to fight alone in West Bengal, Ramesh said the Congress is keen to tide over the seat-sharing stalemate."I don't want to make any running commentary on seat-sharing, but we want this impasse to end and we will find a solution," he said. *—PTI*

INDIA bloc just a photo-op, will not stand anywhere, says BJP

SRINAGAR, 25 JAN

INDIA bloc is just a photo-op and will not stand anywhere in the country, BJP said on Thursday, a day after TMC asserted that it would go solo in the elections in West Bengal.

"Our leaders had already said that it (bloc) was a photo session and nothing else.

They clicked the photos and you will see what will happen to this alliance. You saw what happened in West Bengal, Delhi and Punjab, what else remains there? We believe that this alliance will not stand anywhere," BJP General Secretary (organisation), Jammu and Kashmir, Ashok Koul, said here.

Koul was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event here which was organised as part of Prime Minister NarendraModi's nationwide interaction with first-time voters on National Voters Day.

Asked about the conduct of Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, Koul said the polls will take place.

"There is a decision by the Supreme Court as well and they will happen," he added, referring to the SC directing the Election Commission to conduct elections to the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly before 30 September, 2024.

Supreme Court directions came while pronouncing the verdict on a batch of petitions challenging the revocation of Article 370. *—PTI*

After leading a roadshow in Coochbehar, Gandhi went to New Delhi as the Yatra took a two-day break ***PHOTO: PTI***

RaGa leaves for Delhi as Yatra takes 2-day break

COOCHBEHAR, 25 JAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi left for New Delhi on Thursday afternoon as the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' took a two-day break after entering West Bengal.

The Yatra led by Gandhi, which began on 14 January from Manipur, entered the Coochbehar district of West Bengal from Assam in the morning. After leading a roadshow in Coochbehar, Gandhi went to New Delhi as the Yatra took a two-day break. In the meanwhile, the Yatra proceeded to Falakata in Alipurduar for a halt. "Gandhi left for New Delhi from the Hasimara air base in Alipurduar on a special flight. He had some urgent work," state Congress leader Subhankar Sarkar said. "After the recess, the Yatra will resume on 28 January. Gandhi will come back by then and join it," he saidYatra will the navigate through Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Uttar Dinajpur and Darjeeling districts of West Bengal before entering Bihar on 29 January. Yatra is scheduled to re-enter West Bengal on 31 January via Malda and it will pass through Murshidabad, both Congress stronghold districts, before departing on 1 February. *—PTI*

Don't need to sound poll bugle: PM

BULANDSHAHR/ REWARI, 25 JAN

Launching a slew of projects in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the LokSabha elections, Prime Minister NarendraModi on Thursday asserted that he only sounds the bugle of development and it is the people who sound the poll bugle for him.

Addressing a gathering in Bulandshahr after inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of development projects worth over Rs 19,100 crore, he said when the government reaches all beneficiaries of its schemes, there is no scope left for discrimination and corruption.

"This is true secularism, this is true social justice," Modi added.

"Modi is serving you honestly and that is the reason that under our government, 25 crore people have come out of poverty and those left also have hope that they will come out of it. You are my family, your dream is my resolve and that is why when common families like you will be strengthened, that will be my capital," he said. *—PTI*

UDF terms Kerala Guv's policy address in Assembly a 'mockery'

T'PURAM, 25 JAN

Congress-led UDF on Thursday criticised the Kerala Governor's swift conclusion of the government's customary policy address in the House as a "mockery" and an "insult to the Assembly," while the BJP defended it as a response to the Left front's attempt to blame the Centre.

Left government sought to downplay the situation by saying that Governor Arif Mohammed Khan correctly discharged his Constitutional duty and that the policy address can be concluded in this manner if he was facing some difficulties.

BJP said that the Governor delivered a blow to the Left government's attempt to blame the Centre for all the problems, including the financial distress, faced by the state.

On the other hand, the Opposition UDF said that reading out only the last paragraph of the policy address amounted to "contempt" towards the Assembly.

"It was a pitiful ending to the political drama of the state government and the Governor," Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Assembly VD Satheesan told the media after the conclusion of the customary policy address.

Satheesan said that other than mentioning a few financial issues, there was no proper criticism of the Central government in the policy address.

BJP state President K Surendran, however, threw his weight behind the Governor saying that Khan's actions were a setback for the state government's move to blame the Centre for problems faced by Kerala.

He also rejected Satheesan's claim that there was no proper criticism against the Centre in the policy document.

He also accused the state government of not providing to the people the benefits received from the Centre under various welfare schemes and alleged that this was the reason for poor people dying by suicide in Kerala.

—PTI

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan reading out the government's customary policy address in the House on Thursday ***PHOTO: ANI***

- BJP said that the Governor delivered a blow to the Left government's attempt to blame the Centre for all the problems, including the financial distress, faced by the state. Also, Opposition UDF said that reading out only the last paragraph of the policy address amounted to "contempt" towards the Assembly

'BJP WEDS BJD'

Alleging nexus, Congress organises 'wedding' of two parties in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 25 JAN

Congress in Odisha held a one-of-a-kind demonstration on Thursday, organising a "wedding" that had nothing to do with two persons but two political parties -- the ruling BJD and the opposition BJP in the state.

Maintaining that the two parties were in a "live-in relationship" for long, Congress workers organised the wedding of sorts at the busy Master Canteen Square in Bhubaneswar, with all the pomp and gaiety.

Amid drum beats and chanting of mantras, all rituals were performed by the Congress workers, who were wearing masks of leaders of the two parties, to solemnise the "marriage".

Congress workers even distributed invitation cards for the ceremony. In the 'BJP weds BJD' cards, PM NarendraModi was mentioned as the groom's father and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik as the bride's father.

"The BJD and the BJP have been in a live-in relationship for the past 23 years. So that they don't get a bad name in society, we have organised their wedding," Congress leader Ajoy Kumar said."They roam holding hands in Delhi's Lodhi Garden, and stage drama of political opponents in Odisha," he alleged.

Congree leader Ajoy Kumar said BJD supported the BJP whenever an "anti-people" bill was introduced ***PHOTO: X/@INCODISHA***

- Congress workers even distributed invitation cards for the ceremony. In the 'BJP weds BJD' cards, PM NarendraModi was mentioned as the groom's father and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik as the bride's father

Kumar, Congress's in-charge of Odisha, said that the BJD has supported the BJP-led government whenever an "anti-people" bill was introduced in Parliament.

"The BJD supported the BJP in the land acquisition bill, which was later withdrawn, farm laws, demonetisation, GST, presidential polls and the Citizenship Amendment Bill, besides the candidature of Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for RajyaSabha polls," he said.

In return, no CBI or ED ever came to Odisha for any investigation, he alleged.

"BJP has remained silent on the mining scam, chitfund scam, cabinet minister Naba Kishore Das's murder, MamitaMeher murder case and the Mahanga triple murder case," Kumar claimed.

State Congress President SaratPattanayak alleged that the BJD and BJP together have made Odisha one of the poorest states in the country.

"People of the state will not tolerate them anymore, and they have turned to the Congress. Congress is the only alternative in Odisha," he claimed.

—PTI

ARTICLE 370 ABROGATION

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said terror financing has also been curbed in Jammu and Kashmir ***PHOTO: PTI***

J&K saw 66% drop in terrorist activities: Shah

JAMMU, 25 JAN

Asserting that a new era of peace has begun in Jammu and Kashmir, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the Union Territory has witnessed a 66 per cent decline in terrorist incidents and an 81 per cent drop in civilian killings since the scrapping of Article 370.

Addressing a function via videoconferencing, Shah credited Prime Minister NarendraModi's leadership for transforming Jammu and Kashmir, which was "known for terrorism", into a tourism hub.

Shah virtually flagged off 100 e-buses in Jammu and handed over appointment letters to Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service (JKAS) officers and compassionate appointees.

"I want to tell you that there has been a fall of 66 per cent in terrorism-related incidents.

There has been a decline of 81 per cent in civilian killings and 48 per cent in killings of security forces after the scrapping of Article 370," he said.

This shows that a new era of happiness, peace and normalcy has begun in Jammu and Kashmir, he added.

The Centre revoked Article 370, which accorded a special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, on 5 August, 2019. The government also divided Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Shah said 2,654 organised stone-pelting incidents took place in Jammu and Kashmir in 2000 but no such incident took place in 2023.

He said terror financing has also been curbed in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The era of bomb blasts, firings, stone-pelting and shutdowns has been replaced by education, schools, colleges, medical colleges, management institutions, industries and infrastructure. This is a big change that Jammu and Kashmir is going through," he said.

—PTI

Odisha to get 123-feet-tall statue of Lord Shiva

JAJPUR, 25 JAN

A 123-foot-tall statue of Lord Shiva is set to be inaugurated in Odisha's Jajpur district on the occasion of Mahashivratri on March 8, officials said. The statue is being built near Barahanath temple on the banks of Baitarani river as part of the Baraha Khetra development project. Visitors will have the opportunity to visit and view the Lord Shiva statue using a lift or stairs, and also enjoy a sky view of the Baitarani river front, an official involved in the project said. The statue has been constructed by a private art organisation based in New Delhi. In addition to the statue, a beautiful park and a water fountain are being built for tourists. A rest house will also be constructed near the statue for devotees visiting Baraha Khetra, the official added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SC grants relief to Ansari in violation of code of conduct

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Supreme Court on Thursday granted protection from arrest to Umar Ansari, son of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, in a criminal case registered against him during the 2022 Assembly elections for alleged violation of the model code of conduct. A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and PK Mishra issued notice to the Uttar Pradesh government on his plea challenging Allahabad High Court order. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Ansari, submitted that the main accused has been granted regular bail in the matter. Allahabad High Court on 19 December last year had rejected the anticipatory bail application of Ansari, and said that looking at the facts, the offence is made out. *—PTI*

Fog may lower visibility during R-Day parade

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Moderate to dense fog may affect visibility during the 75th Republic Day celebrations in the capital on Friday, India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday. The IMD said people would be able to see up to only 400M until 8.30 am on Friday due to foggy weather. The visibility levels may thereafter improve to 1,500m by 10.30 am. The minimum temperature is likely to settle in the range of 5 to 7 degrees Celsius, the Met office said. The absence of active western disturbances (WD) weather systems that originate in the Mediterranean region and bring unseasonal rainfall to northwest India is one of the primary reasons behind the blinding layer of fog persisting over the plains in the region since 25 December, the IMD said. *—PTI*

SC refuses bail to realtor in Yes Bank laundering case

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea by realtor Sanjay Chhabria against an order of Bombay High Court which refused to grant him default bail in the Yes Bank money laundering case. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said the offence is serious and the high court considered everything. The counsel appearing for Chhabria then withdrew the plea and the matter was dismissed as withdrawn. A single bench of Justice M S Karnik on 9 October had dismissed Chhabria's petition seeking default bail on the grounds that though Enforcement Directorate (ED) submitted its prosecution complaint against him within the mandatory 60-day period, it had also sought permission from the special court to carry on further probe in the case. *—PTI*

BRO to fence major portion of Myanmar border: Top official

The organisation has already finished fencing 10km along the border

GUWAHATI, 25 JAN

Ministry of Home Affairs has identified around 1,700km of fencing that needs to be done **PHOTO: PTI**

Border Roads Organisation (BRO) will fence a major portion of the strategic India-Myanmar border, and a 10km stretch in Manipur has already been covered.

Ministry of Home Affairs has identified around 1,700km of fencing that needs to be done, BRO's Additional Director General (East) PKH Singh said.

The organisation has already finished fencing 10km along the border in Manipur's Moreh, which was handed over to the Assam Rifles, Singh said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently said the Centre has decided that the India-Myanmar border will be protected by barbed fencing like the India-Bangladesh border, and the government was rethinking the free movement agreement with Myanmar.Four Indian states – Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram – share a 1,643km border with Myanmar.

Singh said the next 80km stretch in Manipur has also been identified and the detailed project report (DPR) submitted to the ministry.Fencing the remaining 250km, along with its approach roads, is in the planning stage with the DPR under preparation.Singh said the BRO has a long-term roll-out plan of nearly Rs 30,000 crore in the northeast over the next five years, and out of this, almost two-thirds is focused in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.The organisation was earlier involved in fencing the India-Bangladesh border along with the BSF, he said.Besides the northeastern states, the BRO East is also involved in developing infrastructural facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands."In the archipelago, we are at present focusing on the Campbell Bay area where a 40km stretch at Indira Point was washed away during a tsunami. We are in an advanced planning stage for a runway extension and construction of jetties along with accommodation facilities in the area," Singh said.The BRO has received a lot of requests from CAPFs, the navy and coast guard in the area for various works stretching around 1,600km, he said.The organisation's primary focus, however, is the strategic infrastructure development of the India-China Border Roads (ICBR) in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, coordinated by the home ministry and the defence ministry, the senior official said."Out of the 29 projects of 1,400 km in the first phase, 24 road projects of more than 1,287 km have been completed, while the remaining five are nearing completion," Singh said.In the second phase, 17 road projects of 548 km have been taken up with 132 km already completed, while in the third phase, seven projects of 411 km are under the planning stage, he said.Besides, the BRO has also been entrusted with 531 km out of the 1,748-km of the Frontier Highway, comprising the India-China-Myanmar border, the ADG said.

- Fencing the remaining 250km, along with its approach roads, is in the planning stage with the DPR under preparation.

The BRO's ambit will be in nine stretches, with work in three portions of 130km having already commenced. Remaining six stretches are in the DPR stage, Singh added. *—PTI*

FOR BETTER SAFETY

Kerala mulls new dam in Mullaperiyar

T'PURAM, 25 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Constructing a new dam to replace the existing over a century-old reservoir on river Mullaperiyar, is the only solution for the safety of the lakhs of people living downstream, the Kerala government said on Thursday.

The reservoir is located in the high-range district of Idukki.

The government's reiteration of its stand on the issue was part of the customary policy address of his government in the State Assembly by Governor Arif Mohammed Khan.

He skipped major parts of the address, including mention of the over 125 year-old Mullaperiyar Dam, over which the state is locked in a battle with neighbouring Tamil Nadu and quickly finished by reading only the last paragraph.

While the Opposition expressed disapproval of the Governor's quick ending of the policy address, the Left government sought to downplay it by stating Khan fulfilled his Constitutional obligation properly.

It said the dam's front and rear faces are constructed of uncoursed rubble masonry in lime mortar and the central core constructed with lime-surkhi concrete.

"Taking into account the excessive and erratic rainfall and floods during the monsoon seasons in 2018-2021, particularly in Idukki district, the only solution lies in constructing a new dam which assures water to Tamil Nadu and safety to the people of Kerala living in the downstream region," it said.

The policy address said Kerala has expressed this view in all related forums and will take all possible steps for an amicable settlement with Tamil Nadu.

The Mullaperiyar dam was built in 1895.

While Tamil Nadu has been maintaining that the dam was "absolutely safe", Kerala has been vociferous in its demand for a new dam to be built near the existing structure. *—PTI*

A cow shelter worker was murdered **PHOTO: PTI**

Murder accused's house razed in Ch'garh

KAWARDHA, 25 JAN

Authorities on Thursday demolished a shop and other "illegal" encroachment in the front portion of the house of the main accused in the murder of a cow shelter worker in Chhattisgarh's Kawardha city.Sadhram Yadav, a gau sevak' (cow shelter worker), was killed allegedly by six persons on the night of 21 January on the outskirts of Kawardha when he was heading to his village Lalpur on a bicycle. Yadav died after his throat was slit.According to the police, Ayaj Khan was the main accused among the five adults arrested in this connection, while a minor was detained.A shop had been allegedly "illegally" built in the front portion of Khan's house and no requisite permission was obtained from the civic body for using the residential premises for commercial purposes, Kabirdham Superintendent of Police Abhishek Pallava said.

The Kawardha municipal council staffers along with police personnel reached his house .*—PTI*

LACK OF CREDIBILITY

Court acquits 3 in gangrape case citing 'lack of proof'

THANE, 25 JAN

The accused had committed the offence from 2017 to November 2018, the prosecution said **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

A court in Thane district of Maharashtra has acquitted three men in a gangrape case citing lack of evidence.

Additional sessions court judge Amit Shete acquitted the three accused, Fletcher Dalmet (24), Searock Munis, 24, and Parag Soj, 27, on 16 January. The copy of the order was made available on Thursday.

The first information report (FIR) in this connection was filed at Uttan Sagari police station under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 376 (2) (n) (repeated rape on the same woman), 376-D (gang-rape), 354-B (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe), and 417 (cheating).

The accused had committed the offence from 2017 to November 2018, the prosecution said.

During the trial, the prosecution argued that the accused had committed the sexual offences against the 24-year-old woman, but the defence denied all charges.

After examining four witnesses and various documents, the court observed that the evidence presented was not strong enough to establish the charges against the accused.

The court said the testimony of the complainant lacked credibility and no corroborative material supported the allegations. The prosecution failed to prove the charges beyond a reasonable doubt. *—PTI*

Cockfight rooster to be brought to court as 'case property'

CHANDIGARH, 25 JAN

A rooster recovered during an illegal cockfight competition in Punjab's Bathinda district a few days ago will be presented before a court as a "case property" when the hearing on the matter takes place.

Three organisers of the cockfight competition -- a banned sport -- at Balluana village in Bathinda have been booked five days back, police said on Thursday.

Following a raid, police recovered the rooster from Rajwinder Singh alias Raju -- one of three organisers, Assistant Sub-Inspector Nirmaljit Singh said.

Some trophies, which were to be given to winning owners of roosters, were also recovered, police said.

Police have given the rooster to a local breeder who is taking care of the bird.

"We will present the rooster in a court whenever hearing takes place in the case," said Singh, adding the rooster was a "case property" in the matter. *—PTI*

Police have given the rooster to a local breeder who is taking care of the bird **PHOTO: PTI**

Accused cannot seek bail on grounds of pending probe: SC

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

An accused cannot seek default bail on the grounds that the probe is pending against other accused or the chargesheet filed by the probe agency is incomplete, Supreme Court said. The bench said this while cancelling the bail granted to former DHFL promoters Kapil Wadhawan and his brother Dheeraj in the multi-crore bank loan scam case.A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said once from the material produced along with the chargesheet, the court is satisfied about the commission of an offence and takes cognisance of the offence allegedly committed by the accused, it is immaterial whether further investigation is pending or not.The apex court said both, Special Court as well as Delhi High Court committed serious error of law in disregarding the legal position and granting bail to Wadhawans. The top court said there cannot be any disagreement with the well settled legalposition that the right of default bail under Section 167(2) CrPC is not only a statutory right but is a right that flows from Article 21 of the Constitution. Under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), an accused becomes entitled for grant of statutory bail if the probe agency fails to file the charge sheet on conclusion of the investigation in a criminal case within 60 or 90 days.*—PTI*

Key accused nabbed in Gujarat boat tragedy

VADODARA, 25 JAN

Police on Thursday arrested a man who used to handle the overall operations of a recreation zone at a lake in Harni area near Vadodara where 12 school students and two teachers died in a boat capsize tragedy last week, an official said. With this, the police have so far arrested nine out of the 19 people named in the FIR. The man, Paresh Shah, whose family members are partners in the Kotia Projects which was given the contract by the civic body to operate boats and other leisure activities at Motnath Lake in Harni area, was arrested from a highway on the city outskirts on Thursday. Though Shah was not formally associated with the firm on paper, his wife, son and daughter are associated with the firm as partners and have also been named as accused in the FIR, the official said.

Twelve students and two teachers of the New Sunrise School on a picnic drowned, while 18 students and two teachers were rescued after an overloaded boat capsized in the Motnath Lake on the cityon 18 January. *—PTI*

RAM TEMPLE DARSHAN TIMING EXTENDED, KEY ROADS CLOSED AMID RUSH

AYODHYA, 25 JAN

The extended timing to offer prayers at the new Ram temple in Ayodhya came into effect on Thursday with 'darshan' being allowed from 6 am as key roads leading to the temple town remained closed to regulate vehicular movement.Authorities have implemented strict security measures in Ayodhya amid a huge rush of people following the 22 January consecration ceremony. Rapid Action Force and Central Reserve Police Force personnel have been deployed. Vehicles from nearby districts have been prohibited from entering Ayodhya, he added. *—PTI*

Kid with cancer dipped in Ganga dies

HARIDWAR, 24 JAN

PHOTO: X/ @ HATEDETECTORS

Superstition of his parents that a dip in the Ganga could cure him of cancer cost a seven-year-old child his life here on Wednesday, police said.

The boy's parents kept chanting mantras on the banks of Har-ki Pairi while his aunt allegedly dipped him repeatedly in the Ganga ignoring his loud cries, until he suffocated and died, they added.

Bystanders tried to stop the woman but she refused to listen to them, the police said.

Eyewitnesses reported the incident to the police, a police official said.The child's parents and aunt have been held for interrogation, the SHO said.The boy was suffering from blood cancer and resided with his parents in Delhi, she said.He died of drowning, the cop said, adding that further inquiry is underway. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF R-DAY

1,132 cops get gallantry & service medals

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

A total of 16 gallantry and service medals have been merged into four now **PHOTO: ANI**

Over 1,000 police personnel have been awarded with different categories of gallantry and service medals on the eve of the 75th Republic Day, a government statement said Thursday. This includes 277 gallantry medals.

After the recent restructuring of medals, a total of 1,132 personnel of police, fire service, home guard and civil defence and correctional service have been awarded gallantry and service medals on the occasion of the Republic Day, 2024, the statement from the Union Home Ministry said.

A total of 16 gallantry and service medals have been merged into four now. These medals are now categorised as President's medal for gallantry (PMG), medal for gallantry (GM), President's medals for distinguished service (PSM) and medal for meritorious service (MSM).

Among the 277 gallantry awards, 119 have gone to personnel deployed in Left Wing Extremism-affected areas and 133 to personnel from the Jammu & Kashmir region, the statement said.

The top category PMG has been accorded to two Border Security Force (BSF) personnel posthumously for their "outstanding contribution in the prestigious task of peacekeeping as part of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) as members of the 15th Congo Contingent of BSF at the Moroccan Rapid Deployment Battalion (MORRDB) camp at Butembo."

- Among the 277 gallantry awards, 119 have gone to personnel deployed in Left Wing Extremism-affected areas and 133 to personnel from the Jammu & Kashmir region

BSF head constables Sanwala Ram Vishnoi and Shishu Pal Singh were killed in the line of duty at Congo in July, 2022.

The PMG and GM medals are awarded on grounds of "rare conspicuous act of gallantry" and "conspicuous act of gallantry", respectively, in saving life and property, or in preventing crime or arresting criminals, the risk incurred being estimated with due regard to the obligations and duties of the officer concerned, the statement said.

The PSM is awarded for special distinguished record in service and MSM is awarded for valuable service characterised by resource and devotion to duty, it said. *—PTI*

THAIPUSAM

Giant Kavadi offering cages are carried by Hindu devotees in a procession during the Thaipusam festival at Batu Caves, outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on Thursday, Thaipusam, which is celebrated in honor of Hindu god Lord Murugan, is an annual procession by Hindu devotees seeking blessings, fulfilling vows and offering thanks
PHOTO: PTI

Indians seek out for jobs in Israel

On a frigid morning last week, hundreds of men, wrapped up in woollens and blankets, queued up inside a sprawling university campus in India's northern state of Haryana.

The men, carrying backpacks and lunch bags, were queueing up for practical exams for construction jobs - plastering workers, steel fixers, tile setters - in Israel.

For those like Ranjeet Kumar - a university educated, qualified teacher who has only ever managed to find work casually as a painter, steel fixer, labourer, automobile workshop technician, and a surveyor for a non-profit - it is a chance too good to pass up.

The 31-year-old has never managed to earn more than 700 rupees per day, despite having two degrees and having cleared a government "trade test" to work as a "diesel mechanic". In contrast, the jobs in Israel are paying around 137,000 rupees ($1,648; £1,296) a month, along with accommodation and medical benefits.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Kumar, who got a passport last year, is eager to secure a job as a steel fixer in Israel to support his seven-member family.

"There are no secure jobs here. Prices are going up. I am not financially stable even after graduating nine years ago," he said.

According to reports quoting officials, Israel plans to bring in 70,000 workers from China and India and other countries to boost its construction sector, which has been struggling since the 7 October Hamas attack. A labour shortage had arisen after Israel barred some 80,000 Palestinian workers following the attack, reports add.

Some 10,000 workers from India will reportedly be hired. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana are accepting job applications, with the Maharshi Dayanand University in Haryana's Rohtak city hosting tests for a few thousand applicants from across the country. (The Israeli embassy in Delhi refused to comment on the subject.)

Hundreds of men queued up at an university in Haryana ,giving exam for construction jobs in Israel India ***PHOTO: PTI***

Like Kumar, the job seekers in the queue are part of India's sprawling and precarious informal economy, working without formal contracts and benefits. Like Kumar, many hold college degrees but are struggling to land secure jobs, and find themselves in casual construction jobs, earning up to 700 rupees a day for about 15-20 days a month. They carried their resumes - "I am a good team player with my team," said one.

Many juggle multiple jobs to augment earnings. Some attribute their financial setbacks and limited prospects to India's 2016 currency ban - or demonetisation - and the strict 2020 Covid lockdown. Others complain about question paper leaks in government exams. Many claim to have tried to pay agents to illegally enter the US and Canada but found it difficult to gather the money. All this, they said, had prompted them to look for a secure, more lucrative overseas job, "never mind the risk of working in a war zone".

Sanjay Verma, who also graduated in 2014, obtained a technical education diploma, and spent six years attempting over a dozen government exams for positions in the police, paramilitary and railways. ("There are very few jobs, and the demand is 20 times their number," he said). In 2017, he failed to pay up 140,000 rupees to an agent for a promised 900 euro-per-month farm job in Italy.

Parbat Singh Chauhan said he had slipped back into uncertainty after the twin shocks of the currency ban and the pandemic lockdown. The 35-year-old from Rajasthan worked as a emergency ambulance driver, earning 8,000 rupees a month for a 12-hour daily job. He also undertook small construction contracts in his village, and even bought six cars for taxi rentals.Chauhan, like many others, commenced his journey after completing high school. He began as a newspaper hawker in school, earning 300 rupees a month. After his mother died, he worked in a clothes shop. When he didn't find a decent job, he did a course in repairing mobile phones. "But that didn't help much," he said.For five to seven years until 2016, his fortunes improved: he drove an ambulance, managed small village construction contracts and ran his fleet of taxis."But the lockdown [in 2020] destroyed me. I had to sell my cars as I couldn't afford the mortgage. Now I am back to driving an ambulance and taking small government construction contracts," he said.There are others like Ram Avatar, a 40-year-old tile setter from Haryana with two decades of experience. Faced with the challenges of a rising cost of living and stagnant wages, he says he's struggling.
—BBC News

SALAR ساڈا

AI tool can sucessfully predict sepsis risk: Study

An artificial intelligence (AI) model can quickly identify patients at risk of sepsis infection and potentially help save lives, a study has found.

Sepsis is a serious condition that happens when the body's immune system has an extreme response to an infection.

The study, published in the journal npj Digital Medicine, found that the AI algorithm, called COMPOSER, resulted in a 17 per cent reduction in mortality. "Our COMPOSER model uses real-time data in order to predict sepsis before obvious clinical manifestations," said study co-author Gabriel Wardi from the University of California (UC) San Diego School of Medicine, US.

"It works silently and safely behind the scenes, continuously surveilling every patient for signs of possible sepsis," Wardi said. Once a patient checks in at the emergency department, the algorithm begins to continuously monitor more than 150 different patient variables that could be linked to sepsis, such as lab results, vital signs, current medications, demographics and medical history. Should a patient present with multiple variables, resulting in high risk for sepsis infection, the AI algorithm will notify nursing staff via the hospital's electronic health record, the researchers said.

"These advanced AI algorithms can detect patterns that are not initially obvious to the human eye," said study co-author Shamim Nemati, an associate professor at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

"The system can look at these risk factors and come up with a highly accurate prediction of sepsis. Conversely, if the risk patterns can be explained by other conditions with higher confidence, then no alerts will be sent," Nemati said.

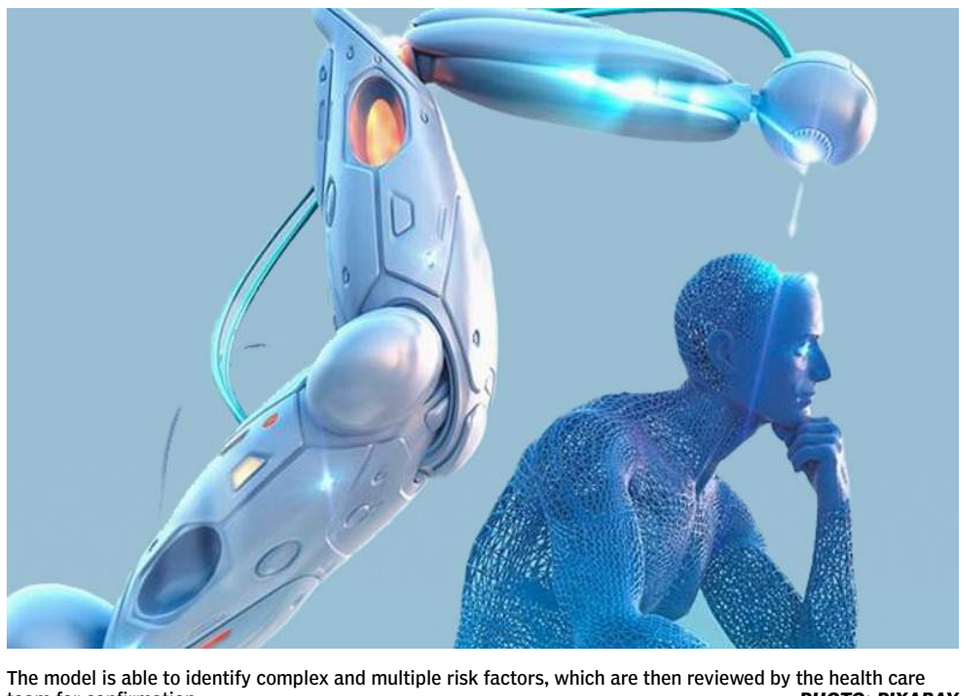
Sepsis is a serious condition that happens when the body's immune system has an extreme response to an infection ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- The study examined more than 6,000 patient admissions before and after COMPOSER was deployed in the emergency departments at UC San Diego Medical Center and at Jacobs Medical Center, both in the US. It is the first study to report improvement in patient outcomes by utilising an AI model, which uses artificial networks

The study examined more than 6,000 patient admissions before and after COMPOSER was deployed in the emergency departments at UC San Diego Medical Center and at Jacobs Medical Center, both in the US.

It is the first study to report improvement in patient outcomes by utilising an AI deep-learning model, which uses artificial neural networks as a check and balance in order to safely, and correctly, identify health concerns in patients.

The model is able to identify complex and multiple risk factors, which are then reviewed by the health care team for confirmation, the researchers said. "It is because of this AI model that our teams can provide life-saving therapy for patients quicker," Wardi added.
—PTI



The model is able to identify complex and multiple risk factors, which are then reviewed by the health care team for confirmation ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Death by data: Pensioners protest as algorithm delete their existence

Dhuli Chand was 102 years old on 8 September, 2022, when he led a wedding procession in Rohtak, a district town in the north Indian state of Haryana.

As is customary in north Indian weddings, he sat on a chariot in his wedding finery, wearing garlands of Indian rupee notes, while a band played celebratory music and family members and villagers accompanied him.

But instead of a bride, Chand was on his way to meet government officials.

Chand resorted to the antic to prove to officials that he was not only alive but also lively. A placard he held proclaimed, in the local dialect: "thara foofa zinda hai", which literally translates to "your uncle is alive".

Six months prior, his monthly pension was suddenly stopped because he was declared "dead" in government records.

Under Haryana's Old Age Samman Allowance scheme, people aged 60 years and above, whose income together with that of their spouse doesn't exceed 300,000 rupees ($3,600) per annum, are eligible for a monthly pension of 2,750 rupees ($33).

In June 2020, the state started using a newly built algorithmic system – the Family Identity Data Repository or the Parivar Pehchan Patra (PPP) database – to determine the eligibility of welfare claimants.

The PPP is an eight-digit unique ID provided to each family in the state and has details of birth and death, marriage, employment, property, and income tax, among other data, of the family members. It maps every family's demographic and socioeconomic information by linking several government databases to check their eligibility for welfare schemes.

The state said that the PPP created "authentic, verified and reliable data of all families", and made it mandatory for citizens to access all welfare schemes.

But in practice, the PPP wrongly marked Chand as "dead", denying him his pension for several months. Worse, the authorities did not change his "dead" status even when he repeatedly met them in person.

"We went to the district offices at least 10 times, out of which five times he [Chand] also accompanied us," said Naresh, Chand's grandson. "Even after several attempts to get this anomaly corrected at the government offices, and after filing a grievance complaint on the chief minister's portal, nothing happened."

Dhuli Chand, pictured, led a wedding procession to prove to government officials he was alive and should be paid his pension ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA***

It was only after Chand carried out the parody of a marriage procession and met a local politician that the authorities finally admitted their mistake and released Chand's pension.

Chand is not an isolated instance of algorithm failure. According to data presented by the government in the state assembly in August last year, it stopped the pensions of 277,115 elderly citizens and 52,479 widows in a span of three years because they were "dead".

However, several thousands of these beneficiaries were actually alive and had been wrongfully declared dead either due to incorrect data fed into the PPP database or wrong predictions made by the algorithm.

Such anomalies were not restricted to old-age pensions alone. Beneficiaries of disability and widow pensions, and other welfare schemes such as subsidised food, have also been excluded because the PPP algorithm made wrong predictions about their incomes or employment, excluding them from the eligibility criteria.

When people who had been wrongfully erased by the algorithm went to government officials to get the records corrected, they faced red tape. Many were shunted from one office to another, and made to file endless applications to prove the obvious – that they were in fact alive.

The ordeal faced by hundreds of thousands of citizens in getting their data corrected has made PPP one of the most controversial government plans of the Haryana government in recent years. The opposition party has termed it 'Permanent Pareshani Patra' (permanent inconvenience document) and promised that it will scrap the programme if it comes to power in the next assembly elections, due in 2024.

The state, however, continues to not just defend but even expand the programme. Sofia Dahiya, secretary of the Citizen Resources Information Department that handles the functioning of PPP, in September 2022 told Al Jazeera: "PPP was easing and improving the delivery of services to the right beneficiaries and preventing leakages through the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning. The interlinking of different databases was done to get an integrated database which was the 'single source of truth'."

India spends roughly 13 percent of its gross domestic product, or close to $256bn, on providing welfare benefits to about half the country's population. Worried that such benefits were being usurped by ineligible claimants, the federal and several state governments have increasingly relied on technology to eliminate welfare fraud.

Profiling families

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar launched the PPP programme in July 2019 and a year later made it mandatory for all welfare benefits.

In the absence of privacy laws, the opposition parties contested the move to gather the personal data of citizens for building out the PPP. The government argued that it allowed "proactive" delivery of welfare without the claimants having to show any documents or needing a field verification.

In September 2021, it gave legal sanction to the programme by passing the Haryana Parivar Pehchan Act.

Death by data

Ram Chander and his wife Ompati, both 60, are residents of Chhichhrana village in Haryana. In March 2022, the couple found out that their old-age pension, which had started only six months ago, had been stopped as they were declared dead in the PPP database.

Ram Chander filed multiple complaints with various government offices but to no avail. That May, he submitted to government officials a notary-signed affidavit saying he and his wife were alive and that their pension be restarted.

In July 2022, the PPP database corrected their status to "Alive" but that error continued in another government database.

The local data entry operator accepted their request of "Mark as alive" and that was finally approved after they presented themselves at the office of the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) who heads the implementation of PPP at the district level. The duo's pension restarted some six months after they had been cut off.

—Courtesy,Al Jazeera

Sri Lankan state minister dies in road accident

COLOMBO, 25 JAN

Sri Lankan state minister Sanath Nishantha and a constable from his security team died in a car crash on a highway on Thursday morning, the police said. Sri Lanka Police in a statement said the SUV in which the 48-year-old state minister for water supplies was travelling crashed onto the rear end of a freight container truck heading to Colombo at 2 am. The driver of the vehicle sustained serious injuries and was admitted to the Ragama hospital, News First Lanka quoted the police as saying. The police have been conducting further investigation into the incident which happened on the Katunayake Expressway near Kandana. Nishantha, a member of parliament since 2015, represented Puttalam. *—PTI*

4 Indians die in mass drowning at Australia's Island

MELBOURNE, 25 JAN

Four Indians, including three women, have been killed in a tragic drowning incident at an unpatrolled beach in the Australian state of Victoria, the worst tragedy in Victorian waters in almost 20 years, officials said on Thursday. The incident took place on Wednesday at Phillip Island, Victoria. A close relative, who was devastated on Thursday, confirmed the names of the victims to The Age newspaper. The four were identified as Jagjeet Singh Anand, a 23-year-old man; students Suhani Anand and Kirti Bedi, both 20-year-old women; and Reema Sondhi, a 43-year-old Indian national who was visiting her family in Australia. The three younger victims lived in Clyde. Victoria Police Eastern Region Assistant Commissioner Karen Nyholm said the victims entered the water near Forrest Caves – close to Cape Woolamai on the Bass Strait side of the Phillip Island's south-eastern peninsula – on Wednesday afternoon. *—PTI*

Japan man gets jail for killing 36 in Anime studio fire

SEOUL, 25 JAN

A Japanese man has been sentenced to death for an arson attack at a Kyoto animation studio in 2019 which killed 36 people and injured dozens more. The incident, one of Japan's deadliest in recent decades, killed mostly young artists and shocked the anime world. Shinji Aoba, 45, pleaded guilty to the attack but his lawyers had sought a lighter sentence on grounds of "mental incompetence". Judges rejected this however, ruling that Aoba knew what he was doing. "I have determined that the defendant was not mentally insane or weak at the time of the crime," Chief Judge Masuda said on Thursday at Kyoto District Court. *—BBC*

Lithuanian Parl delegations visits Taiwan

TAIPEI, 25 JAN

Taiwan Vice President Lai Ching-te received a delegation from the Lithuanian Congress, hoping to build a resilient democratic partnership. While receiving them, Vice President Lai Ching-te said that global peace, prosperity, and stability must rely on the joint efforts of members of the international community. Facing the challenge of totalitarian expansion, Taiwan will join hands with Lithuania and other countries with similar ideals to defend democratic values and human rights concepts. We hope that the two countries will continue to strengthen cooperation and jointly build a world with shared values and a democratic partnership for resilience. Vice President Lai met them at the Presidential Palace with Matas Maldeikis, Chairman of the Friendship Group of the Lithuanian Parliament with Taiwan, Vytautas Mitalas, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and others. *—ANI*

UN says 12 killed at Gaza shelter as fighting rages

According to Hamas ministry more than 25,700 people have been killed

GAZA, 25 JAN

At least 12 people were killed and 75 injured when a UN facility sheltering civilians was struck in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, the UN's Palestinian refugee agency says.

UNRWA said two shells hit its Khan Younis Training Centre during fighting in the city's western outskirts. Its commissioner condemned the "blatant disregard of basic rules of war".

Israel's military said it had ruled out that the incident was the result of an air or artillery strike by its forces.

It added that it was reviewing Israeli operations nearby and examining the possibility that it was "Hamas fire".

Israeli troops have been battling Hamas fighters as they advance into western Khan Younis, a day after the military said it had completely encircled the city.

Clashes and bombardment around the city's two main hospitals have also left thousands of patients, staff and others unable to leave. The conflict was triggered by an unprecedented cross-border attack by Hamas gunmen on southern Israel on 7 October, in which about 1,300 people were killed and about 250 others taken hostage.

More than 25,700 people have been killed in Gaza since then, according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry.

An estimated 1.7 million people - nearly three-quarters of the population - have also been displaced by the past 12 weeks of fighting and many of them are sheltering inside UN facilities or near them.

The Khan Younis Training Centre is one of the largest UNRWA shelters, with between 30,000 and 40,000 people said to be living inside its grounds.

UNRWA said the compound was clearly marked, that its co-ordinates had been shared with Israeli authorities, and that it and the civilians inside had to be protected under international law.

However, at least six displaced people were killed and many more injured when the training centre was struck on Monday during intense fighting in the surrounding area, according to the agency. *—BBC News*

Palestinians try to extinguish a fire at a building of an UNRWA vocational training center which displaced people use as a shelter, after being targeted by Israeli tank in Khan Younis, in Gaza ***PHOTO: AP***

AT LEAST 74 DEAD

The Ilyushin I1-76MD transport plane ***PHOTO: BBC/ RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF DEFENCE***

Downed Russian plane leaves behind queries

MOSCOW, 25 JAN

- A Russian MP, Andrei Kartapolov, began expanding on the statement almost immediately, even suggesting Ukraine might have used a Patriot missile to hit the Ilyushin plane

There are shooting wars and there are information wars and countries that are fighting do battle on both fronts.

For the rest of us, it can make establishing facts very difficult. But whilst that's true in this war as in any, it's important to remember that Russia specifically has a long history of brazen lies and disinformation. That was proven with the shooting down of MH17 and the Salisbury Novichok poisonings, to name just two major incidents in the past decade.

Even the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was launched on a lie: the false claim that a "Nazi" regime was putting Russian speakers here at risk of "genocide". That doesn't mean every word from the Russian Defence Ministry and the Kremlin is untrue - or from MPs and the state media.

But they often are, so they need checking carefully before repeating. This time, the reports that an Il-76 transport plane had crashed first appeared on Russian state news agencies.

They quoted the Defence Ministry in Moscow claiming that dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war had been on board the flight, on their way to a prisoner exchange. Kyiv did not confirm that and from Russia there was no proof. A Russian MP, Andrei Kartapolov, began expanding on the statement almost immediately, even suggesting Ukraine might have used a Patriot missile to hit the Ilyushin plane.

That would mean a Western-supplied weapon - a big claim, with as yet no evidence to support it. As such talk grew louder and spread around the world, Ukraine still made no comment. Russia's noise inevitably filled the silence.

In Kyiv, we started to hear rumours that a prisoner swap had been planned for today - then confirmation of that from a source.

But no-one in Kyiv would say so officially. Everyone we called for information told us, "not yet", or "we're checking information" or "just wait". For eight hours, there was nothing. *—BBC News*

TRUCK TURNS TURTLE

An aerial view of the aftermath in which explosions were set off after a truck carrying 60 tons of liquefied natural gas and a car collided in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on Wednesday ***PHOTO: AP/PTI***

Saudi Arabia to open first alcohol store

RIYADH, 25 JAN

Saudi Arabia has said it will open a shop in Riyadh selling alcohol to a select band of non-Muslim expats, the first to open in more than 70 years.

The clientele will be limited to diplomatic staff, who have for years imported booze in sealed official packages known as diplomatic pouches. Saudi officials said the shop would counter "the illicit trade of alcohol". Prohibition has been law since 1952, after one of King Abdulaziz's sons drunkenly shot dead a British diplomat. The new store will be located in Riyadh's Diplomatic Quarter west of the city centre.

- Thirsty envoys would need to register beforehand and receive clearance by the government
- No one under 21 will be allowed in the store and "proper attire is required" at all times inside
- Drinkers will not be able to send a proxy, such as a driver
- Monthly limitations would be enforced, the statement said. *—BBC News*

China ready to work with Pak to upgrade CPEC project

ISLAMABAD / BEIJING, 25 JAN

China has said that it stands ready to work with Pakistan to upgrade the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project to deepen the political mutual trust between the two "all-weather" allies, a media report said on Thursday.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar said after having achieved the first phase of the CPEC, Pakistan is benefiting from its early harvest projects while remaining engaged with China to execute the next phase.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin while answering a question during a briefing on Wednesday said, "China stands ready to work with Pakistan to deliver on the important common understandings between the leaders of the two countries, deepen political mutual trust, and expand practical cooperation."

China has said it is ready to work with Pakistan to upgrade the CPEC and accelerate the building of an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is opposed by India as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). About the recent visit of Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong to Pakistan, Wang said, he called on President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Kakar, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chief of the Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir and Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani to have an in-depth exchange of views on bilateral relations and issues of mutual interest.

The spokesperson added that the Chinese minister also co-chaired the fourth meeting of the CPEC Joint Working Group on International Cooperation and Coordination with Foreign Secretary Syrus Sajjad Qazi.

"China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners," he said. *—PTI*

US LAUNCHES GUN SAFETY DRIVE WITH FIRST LADY

WASHINGTON, 25 JAN

The White House is trying to enlist school leaders to help spread the word about the importance of safely storing firearms to protect children.

The new initiative will be unveiled Thursday in an event for school principals with first lady Jill Biden and Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. Also participating will be Stefanie Feldman, who runs the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention. "We know safe storage of firearms can save lives, especially by reducing suicide by firearms and school shootings," Feldman told reporters. "I know that there are some parents who wake up every day, drop their kids off for school and while they're watching their kids walk through that door, there's just a little part of them that worries about gun violence during the school day," Feldman said. *—AP*

Stricken Japanese Moon mission fails, lands on nose

SEOUL, 25 JAN

Japan's Moon lander ended up on its nose when it made its historic touchdown on the lunar surface.

The first picture of the stricken Slim spacecraft shows it rotated 90 degrees from how it should have come to rest.

This will go some way to explaining the difficulties it has had in generating the electricity needed to operate.

The image was captured by the small baseball-sized robot called Sora-Q that was ejected from Slim moments before touchdown last Friday.

"An abnormality in the main engine affected the landing attitude of the spacecraft," the Japanese space agency Jaxa said. It seems one of the two big thrusters on Slim (Smart Lander for Investigating Moon) stopped working during the descent.

To get the picture to Earth, Sora-Q first had to transmit it to a second roving robot, Lunar Excursion Vehicle 1, or Lev-1.

This hopping vehicle has radio equipment that can contact mission control independently of Slim. The lander itself was shut down three hours after arrival because it could not get its solar cells to work. With the battery rapidly draining, Jaxa officials took the decision to hibernate Slim.

Their assumption - which seems to be borne out by the Sora-Q image - is that the main spacecraft is orientated in a way that prevents the solar cells from seeing the Sun.

Before hibernation, controllers were able to pull down a series of pictures of the surface taken by its on-board infrared camera.

These show the spacecraft to be on a slope, surrounded by small rocks. Slim's landing location is at the edge of an equatorial crater known as Shioli. *—BBC News*

The first picture of the stricken Slim spacecraft shows it rotated 90 degrees ***PHOTO: X/JAXA***

PEOPLE CLICK SELFIES

Nawaz Sharif supporters bring lion at rally

ISLAMABAD, 25 JAN

In an unprecedented event in Pakistan, the supporters of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) brought a lion and a tiger to the Nawaz Sharif-led Lahore rally on Tuesday, The News International reported.

It reported that the animals representing the party's symbol were brought to the camps set up in the National Assembly (NA)-130 constituency to welcome former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. Scores of PML-N supporters took selfies with the lion and tiger locked in iron cages.

The wild animals have been brought to multiple PML-N public gatherings in the past.

However, PML-N leader Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Nawaz's instruction, a "real lion, brought by one of its supporters for the PML-N rally, has been returned." "Nawaz Sharif has instructed that no real lion or any other animal should be brought to any rally in Pakistan," she said in a tweet.

The News International reported that Marriyum also said the PML-N supremo took strict notice of bringing a lion to the rally on Mohini Road and was directed to send the animal back immediately, after which the lion was sent back right away. On Tuesday evening, Nawaz led a public rally in NA-130, from where he will contest general elections slated for 8 February.

PML-N Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz also participated in the rally, which will start from Mohini Road and go to Ameer Roor Malik Park from Kale Di Puli. The rally will go from Malik Park to Saradar Chapel Chowk, via Moola Bakhsh Chowk, Ibrahim Road, Santnagar and Isalampura.

On Wednesday, Nawaz Sharif asserted that Pakistan faced a crisis following his ouster from the prime minister's office, ARY News reported. In a public gathering at Nankana Sahib, Sharif questioned the rationale behind imprisoning a prime minister who played a pivotal role in making Pakistan a nuclear state. *—ANI*

The wild animals have been brought to multiple PML-N public gatherings in the past ***PHOTO: X***

- The News International reported that Marriyum also said the PML-N supremo took strict notice of bringing a lion to the rally on Mohini Road and was directed to send the animal back immediately

Czech senators reject int'l women's rights deal

PRAGUE, 25 JAN

Czech lawmakers have voted against ratifying an international treaty on women's rights.

Only 34 of the 71 Senators present in the upper house of the Czech Parliament late Wednesday voted in favour of the treaty known as the Istanbul Convention. The result was two votes short of the majority needed to pass.

After the vote, the lower house of Parliament will likely not deal with the treaty and the Czech Republic will be among those countries that have signed the document but not ratified it.

The Council of Europe adopted the document in 2011 in a bid to deter violence against women throughout Europe.

The Czech Republic, also known as Czechia, signed it in 2016.

The vote reflected a split between conservative and liberal lawmakers. Conservatives have argued the document challenges traditional roles for men and women in society and that its ratification in other countries didn't help reduce violence against women there.

Several churches also opposed it. The rejection came despite a last-minute appeal from President Petr Pavel who said the country should have ratified it sooner and that there was no reason to delay.

Slovakia is another European Union member state that rejected the treaty, doing so in 2020, while Bulgaria rejected it two years before that. *—AP*

Rupee settles 1 paisa higher at 83.11 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 25 JAN

The rupee rose 1 paisa in a range-bound trade to close at 83.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as the support from weak American currency overseas was negated by rising crude oil prices.Forex traders said the rupee is trading in a narrow range as muted domestic equities and sustained foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiments.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.13 against the greenback. The unit oscillated between an intraday low of 83.14 and a high of 83.08 and finally settled at 83.11 (provisional) against the dollar, 1 paisa higher from its previous close.On Wednesday, the rupee had settled at 83.12 against the US dollar.The rupee traded on a flat note amid weak domestic markets and rising crude oil prices.*—PTI*

Gold declines ₹150; silver jumps ₹200

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Gold prices declined Rs 150 to Rs 63,050 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a fall in precious metal prices internationally, according to HDFC Securities.The yellow metal had ended at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the previous trade.However, silver jumped Rs 200 to Rs 76,200 per kilogram."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,050 per 10 grams, down by Rs 150, taking bearish cues from the overseas market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,016 per ounce, down by USD 10 from the previous close.However, silver was trading marginally higher at USD 22.78 per ounce. *—PTI*

PNB Q3 profit jumps over three-fold to ₹2,223cr

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

State-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Thursday posted an over three-fold increase in its profit to Rs 2,223 crore for the third quarter ended December 2023.The bank had earned a net profit of Rs 629 crore in the same quarter a year ago.Its total income increased to Rs 29,962 crore during the quarter under review against Rs 25,722 crore in the same period last year, PNB said in a regulatory filing.The bank's interest income rose to Rs 27,289 crore compared to Rs 22,384 crore in the third quarter of the previous fiscal.Its gross non-performing assets (NPAs) declined to 6.24 per cent of the gross loans at the end of December 2023 from 9.76 per cent a year ago.Net NPAs or bad loans came down to 0.96 per cent from 3.30 per cent at the end of the third quarter of the previous fiscal. *—PTI*

Indian firms sign pacts at POWERGEN expo in US

HOUSTON, 25 JAN

Indian companies are looking for business as well as collaboration opportunities in the power generation sector, with some of them signing pacts with global entities at an ongoing expo in the US.The POWERGEN International Expo (23-25 January), is being organized by the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in support with Ministry of Commerce and Industries.There are about 18 participants from power generation, distribution and utilities sector.The Indian pavilion was inaugurated by DC Manjunath, Consul General of India in Houston, along with SandipanAich, Senior Executive Officer ICC.Many Indian companies have signed pacts with American firms during the expo. The Steam Equipments from Pune also signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Texas-based EPC Industries Inc and Chicago-based Tek-trol Technology Solutions.*—PTI*

Markets fall dragged by IT stocks, foreign fund outflows

Broader Nifty fell by 101.35 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 21,352.60

MUMBAI, 25 JAN

Benchmark Sensex declined by 359 points while Nifty closed below the 21,400 level on Thursday due to selling in IT shares and continuous foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 359.64 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,700.67. The index opened lower and plunged further 741.27 points or 1.04 per cent to hit a low of 70,319.04 in day trade. As many as 19 Sensex shares dropped while 11 advanced.

The broader Nifty fell by 101.35 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 21,352.60 with 34 of its constituents closing in the red.

A rise in US bond yields and mixed financial results by corporates triggered FII selling, analysts said. IT, pharma and FMCG shares declined while realty and energy stocks bucked the trend.

Among Sensex shares, Tech Mahindra fell by over 6 per cent after the company reported a 60 per cent decline in net profit to Rs 510.4 crore in the December quarter.

Bharti Airtel, ITC, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, Nestle, Tata Steel, and Maruti were among the other major laggards.

IT shares declined as third-quarter results have failed to impress investors. Wipro dropped 1.68 per cent, HCL Tech by 1.54 per cent, TCS by 1.03 per cent and Infosys by 0.22 per cent.

NTPC, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the gainers.In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.36 per cent while smallcap index climbed 0.54 per cent.

Utilities, power, services, commodities and realty were the gainers *PHOTO: PTI*

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Among the indices, teck fell by 1.39 per cent, IT declined 1.23 per cent, telecommunication (1.21 per cent), FMCG (1.01 per cent) and bankex (0.58 per cent).

Utilities, power, services, commodities and realty were the gainers.

Markets will remain closed on Friday for Republic Day.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark fell by 982.56 points or 1.37 per cent, and the Nifty declined 269.8 points or 1.24 per cent.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Wednesday.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,934.93 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.02 per cent to USD 80.96 a barrel. *—PTI*

FM'S PROMISE

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman *PHOTO: X*

'Social sector schemes to be executed soon'

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the government is close to reaching saturation in implementing social sector schemes designed to provide basic necessities to the poor.

Addressing the students of Hindu College on the occasion of its 125th anniversary, she said the time has come for India to become economically 'aatmanirbhar' (self-reliant) and march forward to become a developed nation by 2047.

Regretting that 60 years since Independence passed without any sense of urgency, Sitharaman said, "we have laid the material foundation for a Viksit Bharat" and empowering people by providing basic necessities to all.

Even earlier government had schemes of providing houses, roads etc but the sense of urgency was missing, she said, adding, nearly 50 per cent of the population were devoid of fundamental things 50 or 60 years post-independence.

"So that's the underlying principle with which between 2014 and today we have done with a sense of urgency. Push the border forward, you take it further. Make sure everybody who's actually eligible to get those should get it...the approach (of the government) is to empower people, skill people, give access and ensure that everyone gets good health treatment and so on," she said.

She also said the government has been able to save Rs 2.5 lakh crore through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) by weeding out dummy and undesirable beneficiaries.

Stressing that the government doesn't differentiate between people, Sitharaman said that is the reason why the prime minister categorises India in fourgroups--Youth, Women, Farmers and Poor-- and efforts are made for betterment of these groups irrespective of caste, creed and religion. She also said that India is nearly self-sufficient as far as agriculture is concerned except in oil seeds and pulses. *—PTI*

Maruti Suzuki, J&K Bank partner up

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Maruti Suzuki India on Thursday said it has joined hands with Jammu & Kashmir Bank to provide financing solutions to its dealer partners.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) inked with Jammu & Kashmir Bank would empower over 4,000 Maruti Suzuki sales outlets across the country with comprehensive inventory funding options for their working capital requirements, the auto major said in a statement.

"Our collaboration with J&K Bank will focus on innovative financing solutions for inventory funding for our dealer partners," Maruti Suzuki India Ltd (MSIL) Senior Executive Officer (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava said.

This strategic alliance reinforces the company's long term association with J&K Bank, leveraging the strength of both the MSIL and J&K Bank to offer tailored retail finance products and end-to-end working capital solutions, thus marking a significant milestone for both the organisations, he added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- MoU inked with J&K Bank would empower over 4,000 Maruti Suzuki sales outlets across the country with comprehensive inventory funding options for their working capital requirements

Industry seeks more funds to boost exports in Budget

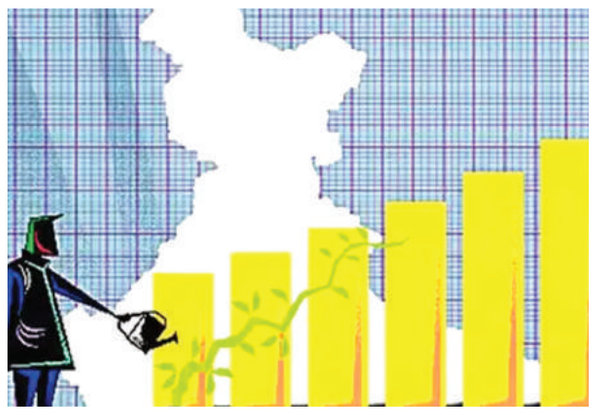
NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Indian industry, including exporters on Thursday, asked the government to provide tax incentives for research and more funds for marketing activities in the Budget to boost manufacturing and the country's outbound shipments.

They also urged the government to consider developing a global shipping line in partnership with the private sector.

India's outward remittance on transport services is increasing with rising exports. "We remitted over USD 80 billion as transport service charge in 2021. As the country moves towards the goal of USD 1 trillion, this will touch USD 200 billion by 2030," Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) said, adding that the private sector may be engaged to develop the shipping lines.

This will also reduce arm-twisting by foreign shipping lines, particularly of our MSMEs, the organisation said. For promoting Research and Development (R&D) in the country, weighted tax deduction can be increased to 200 per cent, it said. "Unfortunately, India's spending on R&D (less than 1 per cent of GDP) is well below that in major nations such as China (2.43 per cent of GDP), US (3.46 per cent), Korea (4.93 per cent) and Israel (5.56 per cent)," Israr Ahmed President (Officiate) and Vice President FIEO said.



Industry also urged government to consider developing a global shipping line in partnership with the private sector *PHOTO: PTI*

He said aggressive export marketing is required to showcase Indian products and services to the global customers, and for that more funds are required under the Market Access Initiative (MAI) scheme.

Further, startup firm World of Circular Economy (WOCE) said the sustainability and climate solutions industry is urging the government for crucial support. *—PTI*

Air India to add 5 more A350s by June

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Air India will add five more wide-body A350 aircraft to its fleet by June, and the process of upgrading 40 of its legacy Boeing 787 and 777 planes will begin in July, its chief Campbell Wilson said on Thursday.

As Tata Group's takeover of loss-making Air India completes two years on 27 January, Wilson also said that on average, one aircraft will arrive every six days throughout 2024.

There will be an addition of 5 more A350s, which will progressively take to India's skies between January and June 2024, the Air India CEO and Managing Director said in a message to the staff.

Air India will also induct 17 A320s and 46 B737s.

The airline started the commercial operations of its first A350 aircraft on January 22, with a flight from Mumbai to Chennai.

Currently, Air India has 117 operational aircraft and together with Air India Express, the total number of operational planes is 180. Last year, Air India placed an order for 470 planes with Airbus and Boeing. The "process of upgrading 40 of our legacy Boeing 787 and 777 aircraft to the same standard, completely replacing the seats and entertainment systems will begin in July 2024. Concurrently, upgrading the interiors of 41 A320 narrow-body aircraft will also commence," he said.

Besides, Air India will launch a new group loyalty programme and is also working with interior design firm Hirsch Bedner Associates (HBA) to refurbish the airline's lounges. *—PTI*

ELECTRICITY USE IN AGRI SECTOR JUMPS TO 37.1%

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

The share of direct energy use in the form of electricity in the agriculture sector in India rose from 28.75 per cent in 2009-10 to 37.1 per cent in 2019-20 of the total energy use, according to a new data yearbook by The Energy Research Institute (TERI).

The total commercial energy input to agriculture rose from 1496 Ã 10^9 megajoules (MJ) in 2009-10 to 2050 Ã 10^9 MJ in 2019-20, it said. Both direct (electricity and fuel) and indirect (nitrogenous and phosphorus fertilisers, and pesticides) energy use in Indian agriculture have increased over the years. *—PTI*

ACC profit soars 4-fold to ₹537.67 crore

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Cement maker ACC Ltd on Thursday reported a more than four-fold jump in net profit to Rs 537.67 crore in the quarter ended in December 2023 helped by enhanced production efficiency and a reduction in kiln fuel cost.

The company had posted a profit of Rs 113.19 crore in the October-December quarter a year ago, ACC, now a part of Adani group, said in a BSE filing.

Its revenue from operations was up 8.31 per cent to Rs 4,914.36 crore during the quarter under review. It was Rs 4,536.97 crore in the corresponding period a year ago.

"Operating EBITDA (excluding other income) has grown 139 per cent, EBITDA margin expanded by 10 pp from 8.4 per cent to 18.4 per cent," said an earning statement from ACC.

ACC's operational excellence initiatives continue to help in improvement of "productivity, performance and optimisation of cost," it added.

Helped by such factors, ACC Ltd's total expenses in the December quarter were down 1.61 per cent to Rs 4,278.78 crore as against Rs 4,349.23 crore of Q3 of FY23.

ACC's revenue from the cement business was up 9.76 per cent to Rs 4,646.04 crore as against Rs 4,232.64 crore in the corresponding quarter.

However, revenue from ready-mix concrete was down 19.54 per cent to Rs 300.02 crore as against Rs 372.91 crore a year ago.

Total income of ACC in the December quarter was up 9.23 per cent to Rs 5,000.51 crore.

The stock closed 11.74 per cent high at Rs 2,498.75 on BSE. *—PTI*

ACC had posted a profit of Rs 113.19 cr in October-December quarter a year ago, which is now a part of Adani group *PHOTO: PTI*

- Revenue from ready-mix concrete was down 19.54 per cent to Rs 300.02 crore as against Rs 372.91 crore a year ago.Total income of ACC in the December quarter was up 9.23 per cent to Rs 5,000.51 crore.The stock closed 11.74 per cent high at Rs 2,498.75 on BSE

Govt bans cheap imported herbicide

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

The government has imposed a ban on imports of a certain kind of herbicide - Glufosinate Technical - priced lower than Rs 1,289 per kg to help promote domestic manufacturing. Glufosinate is a kind of herbicide used to control weeds."The import policy of Glufosinate Technical... is revised from 'free' to 'prohibited'. However, import shall be free if CIF (cost, insurance, freight) value is Rs 1,289 or above per Kg," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification.It added that the order will be effective from 25 January. *—PTI*

IN FY'25

Thermal power plants' capacity utilisation to rise to 69%

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

The capacity utilisation of thermal power plants will increase by a percentage point to 69 per cent in 2024-25, led by the growth in electricity demand and limited thermal capacity addition, says rating agency ICRA.

ICRA's outlook for the thermal power segment is 'Stable', supported by the healthy improvement in the thermal plant load factor (PLF), coupled with the reduction in dues from state distribution utilities (discoms) following the implementation of the Late Payment Surcharge (LPS) scheme since August 2022, a statement said.

"The current under-construction thermal capacity is about 30 GW, which is predominantly in the Central and the state-owned generation segment and is expected to be commissioned over the next two to four-year period," Girishkumar Kadam, Senior Vice President & Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said in the statement.

In our view, there is a clear need for incremental capacity beyond this pipeline if the annual electricity demand growth continues to exceed 6.0 per cent till 2030, after factoring in the renewable capacity addition, he added.

He stated that if annual demand growth is stronger at 7.5 per cent till 2030, to meet the same, the incremental thermal capacity requirement will need to be as large as 70 GW.

Coal has remained a dominant fuel source to meet the base load power demand in the country, and its share in the overall energy generation mix is estimated to decline from 73 per cent in FY2023 to about 58-60 per cent in FY2030, assuming the renewable capacity addition scenario of 200 GW between FY2024 and FY2030, as per ICRA estimates. Nonetheless, the share of coal in the generation mix is expected to remain significant till 2030, it stated. The average spot power tariffs in the day-ahead market (DAM) of the Indian Energy Exchange remained high at Rs 5.4 per unit in YTD FY2024, owing to the sharp demand growth. *—PTI*

According to ICRA, the rise is led by the growth in electricity demand and limited thermal capacity addition *PHOTO: PTI*

- The capacity utilisation of thermal power plants will increase by a percentage point to 69 per cent in 2024-25, led by the growth in electricity demand and limited thermal capacity addition, says rating agency ICRA

PHOTO: AP

Da Silva and Hodge lead West Indies

BRISBANE, 25 JAN

A superb 149-run rearguard stand from Kavem Hodge and Joshua Da Silva pulled West Indies out of the mire after Mitchell Starc blew away their top order in a spell where he claimed his 350th Test match wicket on a day of momentum shifts at the Gabba.West Indies threatened to waste a golden opportunity after winning the toss on a good batting pitch when they lost 5 for 64 in the opening session with Starc claiming three and Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins picking up one apiece. Unlike in Adelaide, where prodigious sideways movement caused trouble, West Indies top order failed to adjust to the extra bounce with five of the top six nicking deliveries they possibly could have left.West Indies 266 for 8 (Da Silva 79, Hodge 71, Starc 4-68) vs Australia.—*AP*

India face Switzerland in WC opener 2024

BENGALURU, 25 JAN

The Indian men's hockey team will open its campaign against Switzerland in Pool B of the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup in Muscat on Sunday.The Simranjeet Singh-led side will take on Egypt in the evening on the same day. The Indian team's final group game will be against Jamaica on Monday. The other teams in the fray include the Netherlands Nigeria Pakistan and Poland in Pool A.Pool C features Australia Kenya New Zealand and Trinidad Tobago while Pool D includes Fiji Malaysia Oman and the United States.The top teams from each will make the quarterfinals slated on Tuesday. —*PTI*

India secured a comeback win over the United States

MUSCAT, 25 JAN

Mariana Kujur and Deepika Soreng struck a brace each as India secured a 7-3 victory over the United States in their second Pool C game of the Hockey5s Women's World Cup here. The goalscorers for India were Mahima Choudhary (17') Mariana Kujur (20' 22')Deepika Soreng (23' 25') Mumtaz Khan (27') and Ajmina Kujur (29'). Jacqueline Sumfest (4' 18') and captain Linnea Gonzales (14') got on the scoresheet for the United States in the match on Wednesday.Sumfest gave the USA the lead with a reverse shot that found the bottom corner of the Indian goal.United States Captain Linnea Gonzales intercepted a clearance from the Indian defense and unleashed a close-range shot to double their lead.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Randhawa first Indian to win Senior Euro Q-School

ANTALYA, 25 JAN

Veteran golfer Jyoti Randhawa became the first Indian to finish on top in the Senior European Tour's Qualifying School and claim full playing rights in the Legends Tour this season. Randhawa finished with a 12-under 276 total and four shots ahead of his nearest rivals. Randhawa who turned 50 in 2022 and played his first few events on the Senior Tour in Europe in 2023 shot rounds of 71-67-68-70 for 276 at the Gloria Golf Club in Antalya. Three players France's Lionel Alexandre (72) Simon Griffiths (72) of England and Spaniard Carlos Balmaseda (72) were tied for second at 280.—*PTI*

Zheng to meet Sabalenka in AO 2024 decider

Aryna Sabalenka beats US Open winner Coco Gauff

MELBOURNE, 25 JAN

Zheng Qinwen PHOTO: AFP

Aryna Sabalenka PHOTO: AFP

Zheng Qinwen has surged into the first Grand Slam final of her career at the Australian Open 2024, blasting past qualifier Dayana Yastremska 6-4 6-4.

Despite struggling with her first serve at times, the 12th seed sealed victory in an hour and 42 minutes, becoming the first Chinese player to reach a major final since Li Na triumphed at AO 2014.

Supported by vocal fans at Rod Laver Arena, 21-year-old Zheng, who began the tournament ranked world No.15, is guaranteed to crack the top 10 on Monday.By advancing past Yastremska, Zheng booked herself a Saturday night clash against defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, who fought past reigning US Open champion Coco Gauff in straight sets.

The second seed has a 1-0 record against Zheng and didn't face a break point against the Chinese star when they battled in the quarterfinals of the US Open in September.

Defending champion **Aryna Sabalenka** avenged a U.S. Open final loss to Coco Gauff and became the first woman since Serena Williams to reach back-to-back finals at the Australian Open on Thursday.

Sabalenka attacked Gauff's serve throughout a 7-6 (2), 6-4 semifinal win.

Sabalenka is on a 13-match roll at Melbourne Park, where she made her Grand Slam breakthrough last year. Williams reached consecutive finals here in 2015, '16 and '17.

Gauff went into the semifinals unbeaten in 2024 after winning a title in Auckland, New Zealand.

The 19-year-old American was on a 12-match winning streak in majors and attempting to be the first player since Naomi Osaka in 2020-21 to win the U.S. Open and Australian Open titles back to back. She'd worked out how to beat Sabalenka in New York last September to win her first major title but didn't have the answers this time against the only player in the final four with semifinal experience in Australia. The first set contained six service breaks, with both players missing opportunities to serve it out.

Sabalenka led 5-2 and missed a set point as Gauff held firm and went on a four-game roll to take a 6-5 lead. Gauff also couldn't serve it out, with Sabalenka's booming returns continuing to cause her trouble.

In the tiebreaker, Sabalenka raced to 5-1. Chants of "Coco, Coco" went up around Rod Laver Arena but they didn't help Gauff.

Almost a half-hour after her first set point, Sabalenka got five more. She clinched on the second of those with a big serve out wide.

Gauff was able to win points on only three of her 17-second serves in the first set, and that made her push harder and led to double faults.

The second set was tight until Sabalenka got a service break in the ninth game.

She missed her first match point when Gauff saved with a forehand winner to end a 12-shot rally.

An ace down the middle earned a second match point and Sabalenka clinched it after 1 hour, 42 minutes.

In doubles, 43-year-old Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden advanced to their second consecutive Grand Slam men's final by beating Zhang Zhizhen and Tomas Machac 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7).

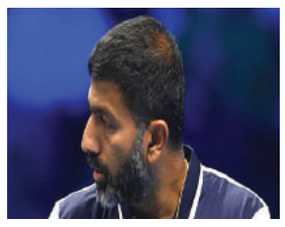
Tournament officials said Bopanna and Ebden, at a combined age of 79 years, will become the oldest No. 1 pairing in tennis history after the tournament. —*AP*

Bopanna one match away from first major trophy

MELBOURNE, 25 JAN

Rohan Bopanna earned himself one more opportunity to win a Grand Slam title by reaching the Australian Open men's doubles final with Australian partner Matthew Ebden after prevailing in a tense semifinal against Tomas Machac and Zhang Zhizhen here Thursday.

The second-seeded Indo-Australian pair faced some stiff resistance from their rivals in the third set but eventually, the experience of playing Super Tie Breakers helped them nail the finish with a 6-3 3-6 7-6 (10-7) scoreline after two hours and two minutes. Zhang (WR 54) and Machac (WR75) are quality singles players featuring in the top-100 list and their powerful hitting from the baseline did make it a tough contest for the experienced Bopanna and Ebden. —*AP*



Rohan Bopanna PHOTO: AP

Mary Kom PHOTO: PTI

I have not announced retirement: Kom

NEW DELHI, 25 JAN

Her future has been a subject of intense speculation since that final Olympic appearance in Tokyo back in 2021 but celebrated Indian woman boxer M C Mary Kom on Thursday refuted talk of retirement even though she is on the wrong side of the international cut-off age for amateur boxers.

The 41-year-old six-time world champion who won an Olympic bronze in the 2012 London edition found herself at the center of a social media storm after reportedly declaring that due to the 40-year age cap for amateur boxers, she has been forced to retire.

In a statement this morning she declared that she had been misquoted and a formal announcement of retirement is still some time away. I have t announced retirement yet and I have been misquoted. I will personally come in front of the media whenever I want to announce it. I have gone through some media reports stating that I have announced retirement and this is not true the Manipuri flyweight (51kg) category boxer asserted. She then tried to give context to her earlier comment insisting that she was merely talking about the international rules and not referring to herself specifically.

I was attending a school event in Dibrugarh (Assam) on 24 January 2024 wherein I was motivating children and I said I still have a hunger to achieve in sports but the age limit in the Olympics does t allow me to participate though I can carry on with my sport she said. I am still focusing on my fitness and whenever I will announce retirement I will inform everyone. Please do correct this she added.

Mary Kom has not been seen in action since her pre-quarterfinal loss in the Tokyo Olympics which was her last appearance at the quadrennial showpiece. She attempted to appear for the 2022 Commonwealth Games trials but had to pull out on the day of the selection bouts due to a torn ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament) for which she underwent surgery.

However, she resumed training after rehabilitation last year and insisted that she has another 3-4 competitive years left in her even though the Olympics was now out of bounds for her. Amid her gradual withdrawal, Nikhat Zareen has taken over the 51kg slot and claimed two back-to-back world titles the latest one coming last year.

Mary Kom on the other hand has been seen in several administrative roles given to her by the Indian Olympic Association. She recently headed an IOA oversight panel that investigated the sexual harassment charges leveled by

Virat Kohli PHOTO: PTI

Kohli wins ICC ODI Cricketer of the Year 2023

DUBAI, 25 JAN

Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli was on Thursday crowned the ICC men's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2023 for his excellent run in the format last year headlined by a phenomenal outing in the World Cup at home.

This is the fourth such award for Kohli who was the second most prolific run-scorer in ODIs last year behind compatriot Shubman Gill.

The former India skipper finished the year with 1 377 runs which included six centuries and eight half-centuries.

The year will forever be remembered as the one in which Kohli surpassed the great Sachin Tendulkar's longstanding record of ODI centuries and the award caps a memorable 12 months for the India batter who guided the country to the World Cup final winning the Player of the Tournament prize along the way for scoring a record 765 runs in 11 matches.

—*PTI*

Yashasvi Jaiswal and spinners make it India's day

HYDERABAD, 25 JAN

Yashasvi Jaiswal scored an unbeaten 76 on the opening day of the first Test vs England. PHOTO: © BCCI

After spinners put England batters through harsh scrutiny Yashasvi Jaiswal rolled out his version of 'Bazball' en route to a crushing fifty as India posted 119 for one to take the upper hand on day one of the opening Test here on Thursday.

At close Jaiswal (76 batting 70 balls 9x4 3x6) and Shubman Gill (14 batting) were at the crease and the hosts were 127 runs in arrears of England's anemic first innings total of 246 which was built around skipper Ben Stokes' hard-headed 88-ball 70.

Around Stokes England batsmen crumbled as the spin troika of Ravichandran Ashwin (3/68) Ravindra Jadeja (3/88) and Axar Patel (2/33) rudely nudged them back to reality of batting on an Indian pitch that offered barrowful of turn and grip even from day one.

The gap between runs and balls could give the left-hander's innings a hue of carelessness but it was anything but that. Jaiswal started his and the team's innings with a clipped boundary to square leg off pacer Mark Wood but that was just the appetizer as the left-hander offered a harsh welcome to Tom Hartley to international cricket.

The 22-year-old smashed the England left-arm spinner for two sixes in his first over one over long-on and the other in front of the square. His twinkling feet and fast hands made it tough for the England spinners to settle into a rhythm against him.

Jaiswal and Rohit added 80 runs in just 12.1 overs to give their side a wonderful launching pad. It came to an end when Rohit gave a catch to Stokes off left-arm spinner Jack Leach while trying to clear him over the long-on. But for the rest of the innings, it was a futile toil for the English bowlers as this could be the beginning of a long and tiring tour for them.

One of them came in the post-lunch session when Joe Root (29 60 balls) and Jonny Bairstow (37 58 balls) added 61 runs for the fourth wicket as England attempted to stay above the fast-rising water. Root and Bairstow generally relied on a sweep and the reverse avatar of that shot occasionally to gather runs. However, Root was culpable of being too premeditated and it eventually led to his downfall.

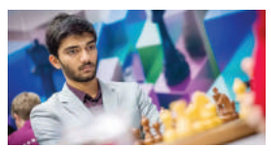
Bairstow too did not last long as Axar delivered a peach from wide of the crease to take out the batter's off-stump. India 119 for 1 (Jaiswal 76*, Gill 14*) trail England 246 (Stokes 70, Bairstow 37, Ashwin 3-68) by 127 runs. —*PTI*

Gukesh crushes Donchenko and shares the lead with Abdusattarov

CHENNAI, 24 JAN

Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh scored a crushing victory over Alexander Donchenko in the 10th round of Tata Steel Masters in Wijk Aan Zee on 25 January.

This was Gukesh's fifth victory overall in the tournament besides two losses and the Indian moved to 6.5 points out of a possible 10. Uzbek Nodirbek Abdusattarov made sure Gukesh did not figure as the sole leader with a hard-earned victory over Max Warmerdam. With three rounds remaining in the first super-tournament of the year, India's R Praggnanandhaa and local star Anish Giri are closest to the two leaders with six points apiece while Vidit Gujrathi is in close pursuit of 5.5 points.



D Gukesh PHOTO: PTI

The day produced just three decisive games and both Gukesh and Abdusattarov won in contrasting fashion.

Playing the black side of a Nimzo Indian, Gukesh went for tactical complications after Donchenko went for an unwarranted King-side attack. The German faltered in his calculation and Gukesh pounced on it to win two minor pieces for a rook. The complications remained but Gukesh never let the position slip out of his hands.

—*PTI*

Indonesia Masters: Sen, Rajawat bow out

JAKARTA, 25 JAN

India's Lakshya Sen and Priyanshu Rajawat suffered straight-game defeats in their respective pre-quarterfinal matches to bow out of the men's singles competition of the Indonesia Masters a BWF World Tour Super 500 tournament here on Thursday.

However, Kiran George remained the lone Indian in the competition as he progressed to the quarterfinals with a 21-11 13-21 21-18 victory over Lu Guang Zu of China. George coming off an 18-21 21-16 21-19 win over Toma Junior Popov of France in the opening round began at his best pocketing the first game 21-11. However, Guang Zu showed great grit in the subsequent game and upped his ante to draw level by winning the next game 21-13. The decider turned out to be even more intense as both were locked 16-16 at one point in time.

But the Indian kept a calm head towards the closing moments of the fixture and eventually walked away with a 21-18 triumph.

He will now be facing Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand in the next round who beat Chou Tien-chen of Taiwan in straight games. —*AP*

India's Lakshya Sen and Priyanshu Rajawat suffered straight-game defeats in their respective pre-quarterfinal matches PHOTO: PTI

TEST MATCH

Sarfaraz serves reminder with 161 after Musheer scores ton

- Indian cricket team defeated Ireland by 201 runs in their second ICC U19 World Cup 2024 match on Thursday, 25 January. Musheer Khan's brilliant hundred helped India score a huge total of 301 and then impressive spells from Naman Tiwari and Samya Pandey ended Irish's innings on 100 runs.

AHMEDABAD, 25 JAN

Barely 48 hours after receiving his umpteenth snub from the selectors Mumbai's run-machine Sarfaraz Khan served a stern reminder to the national selection committee with a majestic 161 that put India A in complete command over England Lions on day two of the second unofficial Test here.

Having bowled out England for 152 on the opening day India A starting the day at 150 for no loss ended on 489 with a massive 337-run first-innings lead which will give them a good shot of gunning for an innings victory.

While seasoned Abhimanyu Easwaran (58) and left-handed Devdutt Padikkal (105) set the platform with a 162-run opening stand Sarfaraz took full advantage of good batting conditions looting runs off the Lions spinners who didn't have answers to his repeated onslaught.

While younger brother Musheer Khan was the hero for India against Ireland with a fine ton at the ongoing U-19 World Cup in South Africa Sarfaraz was expectedly hurt after being pipped by Rajat Patidar as Virat Kohli's replacement in the two Tests against England did the best possible thing let his bat do all the talking. The conditions were featherbed at the Narendra Modi Stadium Ground A but no one can take the credit away from the burly Mumbaikar who gave a masterclass on how to tackle spinners.

Younger brother Musheer Khan PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai's run-machine Sarfaraz Khan PHOTO: PTI

All his five sixes came off specialist spinners three he hit off left-arm spinner Callum Parkinson all down the ground while a couple of maximums came off off-spinner Oliver Price one of which was hit into the cow corner.

He repeatedly used his feet and also played a lot of inside-out drives.

Sarfaraz was also severe on the opposition's best bowler Matthew Potts (6/125) the right-arm seamer who had already played for England. He was creamed for half a dozen boundaries as he repeatedly peppered the cover and extra cover boundary region.

Brief Scores:

England Lions 152. India A 489 (Sarfaraz Khan 161 Devdutt Padikkal 105 Abhimanyu Easwaran 58 Washington Sundar 57 Saurabh Kumar 77 Matthew Potts 6/125)

—*PTI*